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*The Enchanted Country*

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NOVELS BY  
JOAN SUTHERLAND

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ONSLAUGHT

UNQUENCHABLE FIRE

THE DANGER LINE

GATES OF BRASS

CHALLENGE

ADRIAN GREY

THE ENCHANTED  
COUNTRY

# THE ENCHANTED COUNTRY

*By*

JOAN SUTHERLAND



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TO  
COLONEL FREDERICK H. BROWNING

"The Thousandth Man."  
*Kipling.*



THE Southern Pacific express had come to a standstill on one of the loneliest stretches of its lonely track. On either hand lay desolate stony country bounded on the far south by the blue line of the New Mexican mountains, on the north by a raw red mesa above which the air shimmered in the heat haze. Near at hand several bodies lay twisted and motionless in the sun, and about the cab of the mighty engine was a little group of men, the Sheriff of the county and his followers, several U.S. soldiers and the officials of the line; while along the train were curious faces and chattering, excited passengers all asking useless questions about the hold-up that had resulted in the dispersal of the band and the arrest of its leader.

A girl, rather tall and slender, clad in soft grey, had descended from the front coach, and was standing by its entrance watching the scene, and occasionally speaking to her companion, a grey-bearded Englishman, whose kindly dignified face wore an expression of lively interest.

"It's an amazing thing to have happened nowadays," he said; "I thought such melodrama was a thing of the past, even in the West. My dear Phyllis, you've got your wish!"

The girl addressed as Phyllis shook her head and frowned as she surveyed the dusty landscape.

"I'm not quite bloodthirsty enough to enjoy see-

ing those men lying there," she said rather shortly. "But as it had to happen——! they are lifting a man to put him in the train. See, Uncle Charles! Bringing him this way."

A little group of men was coming towards them carrying not ungently the body of one of the raiders, and as it drew near the girl drew back a little, went rather white and shut her mouth closely; and catching sight of long limbs hanging limply, of a bronzed clean-shaven face dust- and blood-stained and unconscious, despite all that had happened felt a pang of compassion for the injured raider as his captors swung him up into a van and climbed in after him.

Then one of the train officials called to a coloured porter, the familiar cry of "All aboard!" rang along the train's length; everyone climbed up, and in another five minutes the train was travelling round a curve, and only the dead men lay on the stony land to tell the tale of what had passed.

Sir Charles Walton, late English Ambassador to the United States, and his god-daughter, Phyllis Chalmington, sat in his drawing-room discussing the surprising excitement that had enlivened their journey from Los Angeles to New York, when the head official of the train came in.

"We fancy we've got an important catch," he said. "Would you care to come along and have a few words with the Sheriff? You mayn't have a chance of seeing raiders again so close."

So Sir Charles and Phyllis Chalmington followed him along the swaying train into a big van, where the four prisoners and their half-dozen guards were congregated; and there, while Sir Charles was talking to the Sheriff and his men, Phyllis looked around at a scene she had never expected to witness.

The raiders were as unpleasant a looking set of



scoundrels as could be desired, and she shuddered and looked away from them to the sunburned, hard faces of their captors ; and then suddenly became aware of another man at the farther end of the van, hunched up on a small box and leaning against the wall. Something in his dusty, torn clothes and bare head arrested her attention, and turning to one of the officials she asked a question.

" Who is that man ? "

" That ? " the conductor said, with a shrug ; " that's ' Black Ramsden,' the leader. They've bin after him for five years."

" That's the man you lifted in, isn't it ? " she said. " But he was hurt—I saw blood on his head."

" He got a crack, I reckon," the other rejoined. " Nuthin' to it."

" What will they do to him ? "

" Hang him mos' likely. Sheriff Muir's got him fixed," was the reply, and Phyllis's face went white.

" But I thought——" she began, then broke off as the Sheriff, a big, broad-chested Westerner, went across and spoke to Ramsden, who raised his head with a jerk and made some brief answer, thus enabling Phyllis to see his face.

Tanned by sun and wind till he was almost the colour of an Indian, Ramsden's face was clean-shaven, and lean, with high cheek-bones, a straight, thin-lipped mouth, and deep-set eyes. There was something reminiscent of the Indian in his features, but none in those steel-grey, fierce eyes, and even now, bound, helpless, and hurt as he was, she could feel that here was a man of vital personality.

The next moment her uncle, the conductor, and one or two more had made a little group about the prisoner, and, hardly knowing why, she joined it in time to hear his answer to some question.

"That's so. I'm not denying it."

The voice was grim, but it was a voice that was peculiarly arresting in quality, and she listened curiously for its next utterance. It came in reply to a question she did not hear.

"Yes. In '03. Outside El Paso."

The Sheriff's voice came next, clear and quick.

"Two thousand dollars and a pardon if you'll give us the names of the rest of the band and take us to them."

Almost before the words were uttered he had his answer: "You kin keep your dollars and your dam' pardon. I'm no Judas."

The conductor of the train turned to Sir Charles.

"I'm blamed sorry for this. Black Ramsden saved my life in a scrap down Mexico way, stuck by me when I was knocked out and pretty near done for. I thought it was him."

Sir Charles nodded.

"A thousand pities. I wonder what sent him on the wrong road——"

Phyllis listened to no more; instead she looked at the man of whom they spoke, with a new and keen interest. His head had sunk once more, his eyes were closed, and between his brows was a deep line as of pain hardly to be endured; his lithe, tall figure was huddled together, and his brown hair was rough and dusty as though he had been rolled on the ground.

Sir Charles and the Sheriff moving a little away spoke in an undertone, and Phyllis saw the prisoner's head drop still lower and his bound hands clench and reclench on one another. Hardly aware that she did so, she drew nearer. His face was half-hidden, for he had turned it towards the wall, but she saw his mouth twitch and quiver despite the vice-like set of

the lips, and that silent, gallant fight against a breakdown of self-control thrilled her oddly.

He was a raider, a desperate man probably deserving his fate, but he was captured and helpless, he was badly hurt from the fight, as blood still slowly trickling from a wound on the side of his head showed, and his career had not been all evil, as the Sheriff's words had testified.

His hands, tied together, were roped to the rope about his feet, and Phyllis saw him make a sudden desperate attempt to raise them to his head, and failing, turn his face towards the wall as far as he could, but not quite far enough to hide what she saw with a sudden quick lump rising in her throat—a sudden glint of hot tears as they ran down his cheeks.

He was alone at this end of the van, believing no one near him, only Phyllis saw that momentary weakness of pain and agonised revolt, but that seeing altered her whole life.

Acting on impulse she went over to him and bending down touched his shoulder.

"I'm sorry," she said in a half-whisper—"so very sorry."

He started as if he had been struck, and jerked up his head, half-turning his face towards her—a lean, hard face bronzed and fierce and not unhandsome, with a mouth once more set like a vice.

"I'm not figurin' to be pitied," he said between his teeth. "You can git out an' leave me——"

For an instant Phyllis was taken aback, then instead of going she knelt down on the dusty floor beside him.

"You're hurt," she said, and her voice, soft and tender as though she spoke to a child, held no resentment at his rough words. "I'm not pitying you—but mayn't I be sorry? You'd be sorry for me."

A moment he was silent, then for the first time he looked at her and she saw his eyes fully—grey eyes fierce as his face, but behind the fierceness a hopeless misery that brought the tears to her own.

“ Oh ! ” she said in a soft little voice that was almost a sob. “ You can’t be angry—you’re hurt——”

Just for an instant their eyes held—velvet brown dazzled by tears and hard grey—then rising swiftly she left him, and going across the swaying van touched the Sheriff’s arm.

“ He’s hurt,” she said. “ His head ought to be bathed and bound up. Will you let me do it? I won’t interfere or take more than a moment.”

Sir Charles opened his lips to protest, then closed them again with the protest unuttered ; the Sheriff hesitated, then beckoned one of his men.

“ Get some water in a bowl,” he said, “ an’ somethin’ to tie his head up with.”

Phyllis waited, looking steadily out of the open door of the van at the vast sage-covered desert upon which they had just entered, and tried to regain her customary poise of mind. She did not understand her own feelings ; the tumult of pity and tenderness that threatened to overwhelm her usually steady nerves dismayed her. Why should this railway raider stir her emotions in this unheard-of way? What did it matter to her that he had met the reward of his deeds? And in the same instant came the vision of his face turned towards the wall, the twisted quiver of his mouth, and the tears that for one instant had escaped control and run down his face.

He was a man, every inch of him—his record, his furious fighting not half an hour ago, and his scornful refusal to betray his companions, all bore witness to that. Whatever had caused that momentary loss of self-control which he had believed to be unobserved,



it was not cowardice or fear, and Phyllis felt an odd little glow of pride at the assurance.

"Here's the water, Phyllis. Are you sure you want to tie this fellow up?" Sir Charles asked. "One of the men will do it, you know."

She turned to see one of the men standing close by with a tin bowl in his hands and a piece of torn white linen.

"I want to, godfather," she said. "Give it me, please." And taking bowl and linen, she went across the swaying van and knelt down beside Ramsden. He did not move till she spoke, then saw the water and bandage beside him and turned his head away, a dull red creeping up under the bronze of his skin.

"You can't," he said thickly. "I'm not fit—you'll spoil all that"—a jerk of his head indicated the dove-grey of her frock. "Don't do it——"

His voice ceased suddenly, for he felt her hands, firm yet gentle, touch his head, and the next instant the coolness of the water, as she began washing the wound; and he quivered under her touch like a high-mettled horse beneath the touch of a spur. It was an ugly cut along the side of the head, matted with hair and blood and dust, and it took some time to cleanse; but it was done at last, and the best bandage Phyllis could contrive from the torn material at hand bound round his head which was aching and throbbing with all it had suffered. When all was done she set the bowl aside.

"It's clean now," she said. "Does it hurt very much?"

He moved restlessly as well as his bonds would let him, for the fever was mounting in his veins, confusing his mind.

"Nothin' much," he muttered. "I'm sure grateful——" And then once again she saw that spasm

of emotion wrench his mouth ; and with the quick instinct to shelter him from any other eyes, she moved till she was between him and the men at the other end of the van.

“ Is there something I can do ? ” she said very softly. “ Someone——”

He shook his head, jerking at his bonds.

“ No—there’s nothin’ anyone can do,” he said thickly—“ only leave me alone.”

The response was ungracious enough, but, moved by an impulse that she afterwards regarded as inexplicable, she touched his shoulder.

“ If I can—ever—send word to me at 900 Park Avenue, New York. Can you remember that ? My name’s Phyllis——”

“ Well, have you finished ? ” Sir Charles’s voice cut her sentence off abruptly, and she realised that he was beside her and the Sheriff at his side, and she rose to her feet, suddenly aware that she was desperately tired ; and a few minutes later, Sir Charles’s hand on her arm, she was making her way back along the hurrying train to their drawing-room.

GENE RAMSDEN stretched his arms and body and dropped down on the rough plank bed, hiding his face in his hands. He was sore all over from innumerable cuts and bruises, his head ached and throbbed till he could hardly see, fever burnt in his veins; yet, used as he was to hardship, his physical hurts hardly troubled him. The suffering that caused that dejection of attitude was mental, and it was worse than anything he had ever suffered in his life before—strange and changeful and stormy as that life had been.

It was three hours since he had been ordered out of the Southern Pacific express, flung into this bare shack to await the morning when he would be tried—and sentenced, as he well knew, to death. There was not the slightest hope of any lighter sentence. He was a notorious raider and captain of a band of ruffians as fierce and lawless as himself; he had robbed and killed; and though the killing had always been done in open fight, the crime against the law remained. Now he had been captured in a notorious attempt at holding up a cross-Continental train, and the rope was all he could hope for.

But for years he had faced the fact that capture meant swift death and he could take his punishment without crying out—what he could not bear was this agony of longing that was rending his very soul; this wild, desperate desire to see once more the face of the girl who had given him so tender a care—to see her

and tell her all the passion of gratitude and worship that was surging in his heart.

Remembering the way he had behaved, his rejection of her pity, his savage resentment of her sympathy, and the sullen silence with which he endured her ministrations, he writhed on the narrow bed like a man in physical torment.

For years no woman of the world that had once been his had spoken to him, and now when a girl treated him as she would have treated any man whose honour was as unstained as her own, he must needs throw her courtesy and her tender pity back in her face like a savage. Worse still, the blow on the head that he had received and the journey following had so confused him that the whole incident seemed at times like a dream, and not the least of his misery was that he strove in vain to recall distinctly the features of the girl who had ministered to him. Even the tones of her voice eluded his tortured senses—all he knew was that it was an English voice such as he had not heard for many a year.

He flung over on his back, pressing his wrists across his eyes, and holding his breath, his bronzed face dark with the blood that his passion drove into it, every limb rigid, and lay there still as though carved in stone, till it seemed as though his lungs or heart must burst. Then a sudden convulsion seized him. He bit on his hands to stifle the choking cry that broke from his throat, his whole body shuddering, and rolling over he buried his face against the rough blanket of the bed, terrible dry sobs racking him from head to foot.

The paroxysm passed after a while with no relief of tears, and dry-eyed he lay there, shaken every now and then by a fierce convulsive trembling, staring up at the rough ceiling, staring, staring—and seeing only



the velvet-soft brown eyes shadowed with tears that had gazed into his.

"Phyllis"—he whispered the name over and over again to himself as the weary hours dragged by; and when the dawn came and he was summoned out to hear his sentence he rose stiffly, eyes inflamed by sleeplessness, and Phyllis's name beating in on his brain with maddening insistence.

Outside the little adobe hut the air was chill and hardly yet lit by the first pale, colourless gleam of the dawn. The country, wide, bare, and level, was still wrapt in shadow and a gloom hardly tinged with grey hid the distant hills; the horses were already saddled and, ready for their day's work, stamped and fidgeted in the cold. Three or four men were standing about, and as Ramsden came out of the hut, his arm held fast by one of the Sheriff's officers, they one and all turned to look at him.

After the horror of the night the icy cold of the dawn air pulled him together as it had done many a time before, enabling him to exist without sleep or food for a far longer time than was possible for most men. He straightened his sagging shoulders and jerked up his head, gazing at his captors with his old devil-may-care pride; this was the end, then—an end shameful as had been the wild crime preceding it, yet now in some strange manner oddly welcome. He had faced death often before—amid Mexican bullets, in drunken brawls and lawless deeds, in the fearful violence of a thundering volcano, on the terrible alkali desert when it seemed that nothing but a miracle could save him—and now there was to be no escape, no hundredth chance. His mouth set in its old vice-like line and he raised his eyes to the clear dove-blue of the sky, where the stars were hardly visible. He had wondered often what lay beyond those stars—wondered and longed to know

with that strange passion that was so vitally and incomprehensibly a part of his nature. And now he was going to find out. In a very few moments he would know . . . and all the mystery would be clear to him for ever . . . he realised he was not sorry . . . he was tired . . . tired to death . . . and death would bring rest. If only he could see her again, just for a moment—and she was hundreds of miles away by now, sleeping and ready to forget the man who had so roughly refused her sympathy. Realising that that way lay deadly weakness, Ramsden reined in his thoughts as he would have reined in a bolting horse, and came to a standstill before the Sheriff.

“Gene Ramsden,” the slow, drawling tones cut the still air like a knife, “I’m blame sorry I’ve caught you. I’d a sight sooner have taken any other man but you, but seeing what’s happened I’ve got to forget that. If I did my duty I’d string you up here and now, but as it is I’m going to give you one chance. I’m going to take you out on the trail and leave you. If you get through I sure believe you’ll not double-cross me; an’ if you don’t—well, you’ll ha’ had a sporting chance for your life—which is more’n the rope would give you. Now git your horse.”

He ended sharply, and Ramsden, dumbfounded as he was, obeyed on the instant, though he could hardly sit the big roan as they moved off towards the east; and in the reaction he was not very clear about his surroundings for the next mile or two. After that his strained muscles began to relax and his head to clear—a halt for a snatch breakfast pulled him together, and when the sun was approaching the zenith he was practically himself again.

They had been riding east all the morning and, leaving the desert behind them, were approaching a

different country where the levels gave place to long stony slopes set here and there with low-growing sage bush and cactus, and the horizon was no longer boundless, but closed in with range after range of tumbled hills seamed through with dry arroyos. Away to the north the country was more open, but to the east the hills clustered thickly, and on the south ran upward to a range of jagged mountains some twenty miles away.

At the head of a long valley which sloped to the east, the Sheriff called upon his little cavalcade to halt and summoned Ramsden to his side.

"A hundred miles to the north lies High Fork and the railroad—three days straight ahead as the crow flies you'll strike open country and the ranches. The south's impassable and the way we've come ain't no good to anyone. This hyar's enough food to keep you goin' for twenty-four hours, and maybe before then you'll strike help. There's a water-bottle filled—an'"—he paused a minute, gazing keenly at Gene Ramsden's face; then pulled a gun from its holster—"an' hyar's one o' your own guns. Keep clear o' any crowds or towns and just leave the country as quick as you can—if you get anywhere as you *can* leave. Get away out o' all this and lie low for a year or two. . . . I'm trustin' you, Gene Ramsden, and I'm failin' my duty . . . because you risked your life for mine an' I don't figure to forget it. I calculate you won't let me down now any more 'n you did then back in El Paso. . . . There's water three days' journey to the north. . . ."

He made a sign to his men, wheeled his horse, and ten minutes later the whole party had vanished from sight round a jutting rockbrow, leaving Gene Ramsden alone, with the hundredth chance for life once more in his hands.

Five days later Leon Chalmington, Phyllis's brother, rode back from a day spent with his friend's riders to the Carden ranch; comfortably tired, keenly aware of excellent health, and exceedingly glad that he had decided to stay on for another fortnight before leaving for New York and later for England. Tanned as he was with the sun, his ugly, clever face with its slightly underhung jaw and broken nose, attractive by its strength and its clean manliness, did not nevertheless possess that subtle stamp of the West that sets its seal upon its sons the world over. Leon was a cosmopolitan of mingled English and American blood, thoroughbred to his finger-tips, a charming young man, clean-living and clean-hearted, highly sentimental, and always in love with every attractive woman he met.

The Carden ranch lay on the slope of a great valley whose wooded sides were threaded with the white beauty of waterfalls, whose floor gave a ten-mile stretch of wonderful grazing, and whose timber was amongst the finest in the whole continent. Leon let his tired horse walk, and pushing back his sombrero gazed out over the beauty of the scene before him, letting the reins lie on El Capitan's neck and entirely heedless of his immediate surroundings, so that he was violently startled and very nearly thrown when El Capitan reared, snorted, and wheeled aside just in time to avoid stepping on a man who had suddenly staggered out from the cedar grove and pitched headlong on his face right across the trail.

In an instant Leon and the two cowboys who formed his party were on the ground, Leon bending over him feeling his heart and scanning his features.

"He's all in," he announced after a swift examination of limb and muscles; "here, give me my flask." And unscrewing the little silver top, he began dropping brandy into the unconscious man's lips, gently working at the throat till it was swallowed.

"He's shore plumb worn out!" Jim, the elder of the two cowboys, remarked. "Bin footing it some little way, I reckon."

He certainly had, to judge from his cut boots, his dishevelled appearance, and the gaunt starvation of his looks. At first Leon feared that help had come too late, for no trace of life seemed visible, then as a drop or two of the cognac did its work there came signs of returning vitality and presently the eyelids fluttered and lifted. Gently as a woman, shocked at the man's ravaged appearance, Leon spoke.

"That's better now—that's better. Just swallow a little more, there's a good fella. Just a little—well done!—we'll soon have you home. A little more——"

Kneeling on one knee, he lifted Gene till his head and shoulder rested against his knee and his encircling arm sent Danny the younger man for water and bathed his face free from the dust and grime of the last dreadful days, then, as Gene tried vainly to speak, he summoned Jim and raised him to his feet.

"I'm going to put you up on my horse. He doesn't want any riding and Jim'll keep a hand on you—and we'll soon have you at the ranch—you poor devil."

The last words were hardly audible, but Gene heard them and the ghost of a smile dawned in his eyes; then all went dark again as they lifted him into the saddle and it was all he could do not to fall as he swayed unsteadily to the horse's movement.

He remembered very little about the next hour's ride, and Leon walking beside him knew rather more than he wished, for he was obliged to help in holding him in the saddle and soon became aware of the extreme unpleasantness of walking in the high-heeled cowboy boots he was wearing.

The sun was dropping down the western sky when they arrived at the ranch, and Leon's host, Jim Carden,



was on the porch smoking and watching for him. At the sight of the walking man and led horses he came to meet them, and hearing Leon's explanation had a look at the stranger. As he did so, Leon in his turn scanned him and something in the bronzed face seemed oddly familiar, but he knit his brows and searched his memory in vain as Carden gave directions for the unfortunate man's welfare.

"I believe I've seen him somewhere before," he said as he heard of the finding. "Face is familiar—and not one to forget. He's rather a fine-looking chap if he weren't so starved. Wonder what's his story. Something wrong, I s'pose."

Carden nodded and knocked out the ashes from his pipe on his heel, he too felt that the stranger's face was one he knew; but Leon felt as though some instinct forbade him to seek too closely into that hidden memory, and when the next morning he went into the room where Gene was he put the thought away from him.

Gene was up and got into his clothes. He still looked gaunt and red-eyed after his dreadful tramp, but his powerful frame and iron constitution was already throwing off its weakness after the food and long night's sleep. As Leon entered he dropped the cartridge-belt he was buckling on and drew back a little, almost as though he expected an attack—a movement Leon did not fail to notice; then seeing the latter's cheery grin, his tense muscles relaxed.

Leon spoke first.

"Hullo—it's good to see you up. How d'you feel? You were pretty nearly all in when we found you yesterday."

He held out his hand as he spoke, and just for one instant Gene hesitated to take it, his eyes searching the other's face with their swift, compelling glance

and that dim confused memory in Leon's brain raised its head once more—then Gene laid his hand in Leon's and wrung it with a fierce, hard grip.

"You found me, didn't you?" he said in his slow drawl. "I saw your face. . . . Yes, I reckon I was all in."

"I was afraid we were too late," Leon said; "but you've pulled round pretty quickly, I'm glad to see. I'm leaving here at midday, so I'm glad to see you're better before going."

"Leaving?" There was a note of interrogation in Gene's voice. "This ain't your ranch, then?"

"Good lord, no!" Leon cried. "Wish it were! I've only been here for a month after crocking up, and now being perfectly fit I'm off east. Worse luck! Look here, you've not had any breakfast yet. Come out to the porch and get some."

They went out together, and save that Gene lurched a little as he walked and that his face was still haggard he showed nothing of his dreadful experience. To Leon, and Carden who joined them, he told a story of a ride from a distant ranch, of his horse's fall and broken leg, and of the tramp that followed; and Carden accepted the story, though he gave no sign as to whether he believed it or not, while Leon was keenly interested and deeply sympathetic—so sympathetic in his cheery, kindly way that suddenly Gene broke off in the middle of a sentence.

"That's enough 'bout it," he said. "Mr. Carden. I was fool enough to lose pretty near everything I had playin' poker. D'you want a rider? I know the work."

Carden's eyes scanned his hard, bold face. Moment by moment he was becoming surer that his suspicions were correct, and now at Gene's remark about poker they leaped to certainty.

"Why, no," he said with a drawl even more pronounced than that of his guest, "can't say as I do. Though horses sure are in your line, Gene Ramsden."

Gene's chair was overturned and he was on his feet, gun in either hand in one single flash of movement, and Leon saw his face whiten under its bronze with eyes that blazed and lips that were drawn back from gleaming teeth.

"My line's what I choose to make it," he snarled. "Keep still—both of you."

With levelled guns held low, he kicked the chair away from behind him.

"Hand out all the cash you've got and put it on that table," he said, his low, tense voice in startling contrast to his usual drawl. "And lay your guns and belt beside it. Hustle!"

Leon's hands were upheld mechanically, but he was so interested that he quite forgot the real issue.

"I've no gun, but you could have had some money without all this," he said. "How am I to give it to you if I've got to hold my hands above my head in this absurd fashion?"

"Lower y' left hand—an' don't talk."

The command was rapped out and Leon did as he was bid, while Carden, cursing with rage at his helplessness and the fact that not fifty yards away were his own boys out of sight, laid gun, belt, notes, and money on the little table.

Never taking his eyes away, Ramsden put back one gun in its holster, gathered up the money and guns, took up the belt and backed slowly away across to the edge of the porch. Then he spoke.

"Send one of the boys for a horse," he said. "An' if you give one sign you're a dead man."

Carden was no coward, but to object would have been folly, for he knew his man; so he shouted for a servant,

and when he came—a Mexican half-breed—gave him the order, seeing the gleam of Ramsden's hidden gun even as he spoke.

The horse came in a couple of minutes—a big, up-standing bay—and Ramsden strolled towards him still with his right hand held with apparent carelessness near his hip.

“ I'm blame sorry to have to go so soon,” he said, with a sudden mocking little smile, “ an' you treated me well too—but the choice ain't mine. I can't afford to be recognised off-hand like. Bad for my health ! ”

With a bound as quick as a panther's he was in the saddle, and as he rode down the long slope towards the east he sat turned on his horse still covering the two men until he was near the limit of gunshot range ; then quite suddenly he dug spurs into his horse's flanks, crouched low in the saddle, and was off like a streak of lightning.

PHYLLIS CHALMINGTON, velvet-brown eyes remote like her thoughts, came slowly down the wide, shallow-stepped staircase and stood for a moment or two in the centre of the hall.

It was yet early in the afternoon, and the house was very still with that suggestion of somnolence so often to be observed after luncheon on a summer day. Sunshine flooded the hall with its pleasant white-pane'led spaciousness and its really beautiful pieces of old furniture, the air was scented with the fragrance of the flowers that seemed to be everywhere, and the only sound that could be heard was the sleepy, voluptuous cooing of doves, somewhere out in the garden.

Phyllis, rather tall, rather slim, and fair with the deep, golden fairness that does not fade nor darken with the years, clad in a straight, soft frock of hyacinth blue, was gazing straight out of the door that stood open all the summer long, but with eyes that for the time being saw little of the fair scene they rested on. She was deeply preoccupied, and though she carried a book under her arm and a scarlet cushion by one corner, it was force of habit rather than the belief that she would read.

A large tabby Persian cat, known to the adoring household as Marshal Foch because of his great courage and character, lay full length on a mat in the sun, looking like a small tiger, eyes closed, whiskers drooping, while not far away a black spaniel was curled up

fast asleep. Her name was Kala Moti, which denotes in Hindustani "Black Pearl," but owing also to her character she was called the Devil-Pig, which name dated from a sad day in her youth when—staying at the sea in a cottage with the more juvenile members of the household—she found and ate a lobster thrown on the village dust-heap for reasons better imagined than smelt.

But neither Marshal Foch nor the Devil-Pig received their customary tribute of a caress from their mistress. Phyllis had no thought to spare for anything this drowsily golden afternoon, and was for once heedless of the picture framed by the Adams doorway of the house. The wide stretch of lawn, the oblong of the swimming-pool, that had once been the Manor fish-pond, with its square-topped pollarded lime-trees in a sedate row on either side, the mass of colour in the wide herbaceous border before and the equally lovely stretch of country beyond, with the blue horizon of sea and sky—she loved that view summer or winter alike, but to-day she did not even see it. All she wanted was to ensure solitude for the next hour in which to think over that which had befallen her; and presently, moving slowly like a person in a dream, she went out from the hall into the heat and scented loveliness of the garden and wandered away to a remote corner beyond a great hedge of yew to a small, sheltered lawn hidden entirely from the house.

There were two low chairs there of white Madeira cane, and into one she sank, put up a pale-blue Japanese umbrella and sat gazing into space.

Just an hour ago her father had taken her into the library to tell her of the amazing thing that had happened . . . and she was trying now to visualise the thing it entailed. For nine years Hugh Chalmington had been a widower, and now in a very short time he was



about to marry again, a woman only one of his children had ever met, though each one had heard of her, Joyce Walton, widow of Sir Charles Walton, late Ambassador to the United States. Sir Charles had been Phyllis's godfather, and it was just after his transfer from Washington to Rome, and during Lady Walton's absence in England, that Phyllis had taken the momentous journey from California back to New York that had been so strangely and—for Phyllis—so fatefully interrupted by the train robbery.

Sir Charles had held the appointment just four years, dying suddenly of heart failure, and his widow with her daughter had returned to England only recently. Hugh Chalmington had been to town as usual quite a good deal during the winter, but had not as usual gone to the South in the spring. Instead Phyllis had gone with Norah Chalmington, an aunt, and Hugh had gone to London. The reason of this departure from custom was now clear, and Phyllis wished to consider it without prejudice.

Her father was still a young man in years—he had married at nineteen and was now only just fifty—in appearance he looked ten years younger, in health, temperament, and habits he was not a day over thirty-five. He had been nervous over the breaking of his news, a rare thing for him. Phyllis considered the memory gravely; so far as she could remember she had never known him even faintly ill at ease before. He had fidgeted with a cigarette, twisting it all to pieces, had wandered up and down the room, had hesitated over the words he chose.

His daughter, who all her life had been his devoted friend, smiled a little queerly maternal smile as she thought of it, then grew quickly grave again. Hugh had said that Joyce was adorable, that she was only desirous of making happiness, that she dreaded any

feeling of coldness between her and her future step-children, and that he wished nothing to be different. Of course she would say that, of course Hugh would think her adorable, and equally of course everything must be different. Phyllis was twenty-eight. For eight years she had been mistress of Hugh's house and mother to the family; now Joyce Walton would take her place, and that long, delightful, close companionship with an intellectual and attractive man must end. Hugh had taught her everything; to Hugh she owed her catholic tastes in literature and music, her deep appreciation of the work of both the great artists of the past and those of the present, her knowledge of the world, her love of horses and proficiency in sport, and her intense, almost passionate, sense of justice. And now Hugh was ending it all, and there she realised that the sting lay. To her it had been all-sufficient this intimate friendship, and she had believed it had been the same to him, and then that sense of justice that he had so implanted in her pulled her up. Had it been sufficient? Had it meant everything?

The English garden with its fresh greenness and scented colour faded from her eyes, and in its place was the sand and grit and stones of the New Mexican desert, with a merciless sun in a burning whitish-blue sky, a red line of mesa bounding the vision, with the excited questioning passengers and those little groups of men gathered about recumbent figures on the cracked ground.

She could hear the blowing steam of the engine, the chatter and hum in the coaches, and a minute later the clank and rattle as the train started again with a soul-rending jar—and her thoughts, leaping onward, brought her to the moment when she had stood in the van looking at the crouching, shackled figure of a man.

She could see his face now, burnt almost the colour

of mahogany, with its hard lines, its knitted brows and set mouth—and a little shiver ran through her as that mouth suddenly twisted and that head bent and turned desperately to hide the sudden spasm of weakness.

How grey and fierce his eyes were when they looked up at her despite the tears not a moment before. And again that little shiver ran through her, giving her a sensation physical rather than mental, that moved her strangely, whether in pity or pleasure she could not tell.

What had become of him? Where was he? In all the wide spaces of the world how could she ever hope to meet him again? Yet his image had remained persistently with her, his personality had made so powerful an impression that no other men interested her. She was quite aware that she was being foolish according to all accepted standards, but she was very single of purpose, and after all it is singleness of purpose that in the long run counts in the only way worth having.

Such faithfulness to a memory carried its own penalty. She was subject to fits of depression, all the deeper because she did not willingly show her feeling and concealed her moods from those around her; and despite the interest attaching to her present situation, the sense that her whole life was a vain thing was strongly upon her.

No. Hugh's love and companionship had not been wholly sufficient; she must not be hurt because he too had felt a want. The fact that he, luckier than herself, was able to satisfy it must not cause her to feel a sense of injury . . . but it would be difficult all the same to experience no hurt. . . . Hugh had been so particularly her own. Odd childish memories, disconnected and unimportant in themselves, floated back into her consciousness. The day when Aunt Constance, shocked

at the intimacy between them, had endeavoured to insist on the small girl's use of the respectful "father" instead of the wholly familiar Christian name—her own sturdy obstinacy, Hugh's lazy amusement, and Aunt Constance's indignation. "I like her calling me Hugh. I want to be a pal, not a parent."

And he had been—a thousand times over, the best friend and companion in the world. They had done everything together, had ridden neck-and-neck in the hunting-field, had taken long ski-ing expeditions on those delightful winter-sport holidays in Switzerland, had explored the twisting side roads and bridle paths of the land behind the fashionable Riviera, had discussed every subject under the sun, and both been absurdly delighted when strangers thought them husband and wife. And now those years were all but over. In the future Joyce must take the place she had looked upon as wholly her own. Joyce—what was she like? This woman who had won Hugh's heart?

Phyllis became suddenly aware that the tears were running down her face, and tears were so strange to her that for a moment she was taken back. Then she rubbed them vigorously away, powdered her nose, and resolutely turned her thoughts to the future. Hugh was going to be married almost at once—in three weeks, and in six he and his wife would be back at the Manor. There would have to be changes in the household . . . domestic alterations—they must occupy the big tower room at the western end of the house, which for many years had been given over to guests. . . . Joyce would want a sitting-room of her own—perhaps the chapel room—and there was the child.

With a start of dismay, Phyllis, sternly keeping her mind to practical commonplace details, realised she had forgotten the child. Hugh had said a girl, some-

where about nine or ten he thought, perhaps a little younger. That would mean a big difference in the nursery arrangements, for an extra child in a house where there are already two makes a difference. The nurseries—Phyllis's thoughts stopped with a jerk. There might be another use for the old nurseries. Hugh might have other children, and the possibility made her realise very forcibly what his second marriage meant. She must take a second place. She must . . . Hugh's happiness was wrapped up in this stranger; he needed from her the physical and mysterious intimacy of marriage that no other relationship could give—and Hugh must be happy. He must. If only the wrench of giving him up were not quite so painful! If only she could be sure that Joyce would understand a little how much he had been to her all her life!

Across the lawn, tall, spare with the spareness of a man trained and fit to the last ounce, broad of shoulder, lean of hip, moving with the easy grace of a thoroughbred, came a man clad in riding-breeches and long brown boots, an old tweed coat, very worn and shabby and very perfectly cut, and a shirt of thick cream silk. He was bare-headed, and the brilliant afternoon sun showed him clean-shaven, with dark hair that crisped and was a little grey on the temples, deep-set clear-grey eyes, square chin and good jaw, and the same spareness in the lines of the face as was noticeable in the lines of the body. The cheeks were a trifle inclined to hollow-ness, there were faint lines about the eyes, but the face was the face of a young man, grave in repose, charming when animated—thoroughbred and good to look at.

Phyllis saw him coming, hoped desperately that no trace of her amazing emotion was visible, and lifted a hand in lazy salute.

“Hullo, Hugh! Are you going out?”

“Hullo, Phyl—yes, I'm riding over to Wrexford. I



thought"—he dropped easily into a chair by her side—"I thought—er—I ought to tell Norah and Hilary. Don't you think so?"

Phyllis nodded, watching him intently since he was not looking at her.

"Yes. I think so. . . . Shall you be back for tea?"

"Not if they're in. . . . By the way"—he was striving to be his usual careless self—"I thought you might like to see this."

He handed over a photograph, and Phyllis found herself looking at the portrait of a woman well-featured, looking very young and fair and attractive.

"That's Joyce," he said. "She's fair, almost your colouring, blue eyes . . . so very blue. . . ."

"She's charming to look at," Phyllis said generously. "Pretty, too." Oh, why did his eyes light up as they looked at the pictured face, or his voice take on that odd husky throaty tenderness? She dug her nails into the palm of her hidden hand, driving back the unworthy pain, and suddenly Hugh looked at her in the old, dear, understanding way.

"It will be both of you," he said—"not Joyce in your place. Help her. It will be difficult at first. I shall want your help more than ever before."

He could always comfort her because he always understood her; she knew he knew the pain of this situation for her lay in her fear lest he should no longer need her—and now stretching out a hand she laid it on his.

"Are you sure?"

The two pairs of eyes met, one grey, one brown, oddly alike despite the hazel tinge in his and the dusky velvet shadow in hers; met and held with an equal steadiness and truthfulness of glance.

"Quite sure," he said simply, and a quick warmth



crept into her heart, enabling her to face more equally the contemplation of the change.

"When are you going to tell the others?" she asked. "Leon will be down by the 4.10, and they should be told at once if Aunt Norah is to know to-day."

"After dinner. I'm funking it rather. The ride'll do me good. . . . Thank you, Phyl, for the way you've taken it. It was a stiff fence, but you were always a thoroughbred. I'll be off now. Anything you want ordered?"

"No thanks, dear, unless you might call at Garrat's and see if my saddle is ready. I shan't wait tea for you."

"That's right. Good-bye," and off he went to ride to his brother's house, Wrexford, four miles away, leaving her alone once more with her thoughts, trying to hold on to the comfort he had given her, and with his leaving her came a normal realisation of her surroundings, a loosening of the bond that had held her physical consciousness in check.

It was very hot despite the shade, hot with the clear, strong heat of unclouded sunshine, and from where she sat the garden looked its best. Just at her side, a great hedge of white and purple lilac hid the western view and filled the air with scent and the drone of bees; across the centuries-old turf in the opposite direction a pink double-rambler poured itself over a disused pigeon-cote in a cataract of pale rose-hued petals, while a little farther off a chestnut tree, its red blossoms like Christmas-candle decorations, lifted its massed curves of foliage against the Southern blueness of the sky above the yew hedge that enclosed this little backwater of the garden.

In the distance she could hear a lawn-mower at work, too far away to be disturbing by its noise, pleasant in its suggestion of someone else's activity; but presently

she became aware that the heat in this sheltered corner of the garden was altogether too great, and rising she took her unopened book, left the scarlet cushion on the grass, and went away across the turf towards the more open stretches.

She felt ill at ease, unable any longer to sit still and think over what she had heard ; and walking along the slope of ground that lay to the west of the house, her physical vision, in sharp contradiction to the mood of less than an hour ago, seemed curiously sharpened. She saw her home suddenly as a stranger might see it—the house large and white and spacious, modernised internally, almost rebuilt in the days of the Adams brothers ; the gardens with their thick yew and holly hedges, the ilex and cypress and live-oak trees, the orchards thickly planted quite near to the house, a maze of pink and white blossom in the spring-time. And away a little on the eastern side the neat yards and pleasant homely buildings of the farm.

Rounding the corner of the big fruit garden, she wandered out of a gate, climbed a short slope by means of a footpath through the hay and looked down at the tiled roofs, the whitewashed stone and old timber and stucco of the barns and sheds, and farther off the stack-yard with the golden glint of last year's stacks behind. Despite the age of many of the buildings, it was all in exquisite repair, the grass mown and trimmed, the red-tiled paths spotless, the white paint fresh, the gardener's cottage a modern place in black-and-white half-timber just beyond the gates into the main yard, trim and pretty, the other cottages across a level strip of meadow—the head cowman's, the shepherd's, the head stableman's—all with their gardens and trees, also modern but charmingly planned, and sufficiently shaded by trees.

The cows were coming in to be milked from a wide, flower-spangled meadow shaded on one side by a row

of poplars—a herd of red Jerseys, diversified by a few Alderneys, mouse-coloured, and some decorative black-and-white Friesian. Phyllis watched them with gravely considering glance. How would this stranger regard it all? Would she see the homely beauty, the peaceful, well-ordered existence with its dignity and healthful nearness to Nature?

The clock on a little Wren brick tower over the stables struck four in its funny cracked voice, and Phyllis turned westward and went out by the big white farm-gate on to the road. A lane joined it here, coming down from wooded higher lands and a stretch of moor farther again to the west, and as she stood looking at the wealth of green in the farther orchard across the road there came to her the distant sounds of a pony trotting and of children's laughter. The next moment a brown governess-cart came in sight drawn by a brown pony and filled to overflowing as it seemed with children, who, seeing her, whooped and shouted, urging the pony to a waddling gallop down the last fifty yards—a gallop that by every law of nature should have ended in utter disaster at the right-angled turn of the road below the gate, but which only resulted in an extraordinary swerve of the brown cart, a momentary balancing act on the part of the fat brown pony, and the scuffling of four sturdy little hoofs in the dust, as the four children spilled themselves out of their chariot.

"We've had a wonderful time! Lulu fell into the river——"

"Only up to her knees——"

"An' we found a kingfisher's nest——"

"Down by the weir! It was lovely with——"

"An' I bit a caterpillar in two—by mistake o' course! A funny one—all hair! Horrid!"

Four children all talking at once: Judy, aged four-

teen, rather tall, all legs and arms, with great dark eyes and heavy chestnut curls tumbling anyhow just to her shoulders about a vivid face; Ronnie, just nine, her brother, with Dutch-cut hair, jade-green tunic, and the shortest of knickers on his brown legs; and the others two friends who lived a mile or two away.

Judy, getting back into the pony-cart, drove to the stables, and the others accompanied Phyllis through the gardens to the house, all talking at once of the picnic they had had on the moor some five miles away.

The house-front was shaded by green sun-blinds and faced out across the gardens and fields to that fair blue distance which she so loved, and as she drew near her eyes almost instinctively sought the western end of the house with its jutting-out little tower.

There was the tower-room—leaving the children abruptly, she went into the hall and up the shallow steps, turned to the left at the top, and going along a short passage opened a door.

It led into a very big, spacious bedroom panelled in ivory-hued wood, one large round window facing south, the other, an octagonal one, in the little tower itself. The hangings were soft ivory silk with a quaint embroidered border of flowers, and the quilt on the great lacquer bed was similar; the carpet, a faded Aubusson, was all soft greens and greys with cornucopias spilling flowers at either corner. The remainder of the furniture was very beautiful lacquer black and gold, and there was the white-tiled, luxurious bathroom adjoining. Yes. This would be Hugh's room in future—the marriage room, the place where, shut in alone with his wife, he would in her arms forget the daughter who had been all-in-all to him.

Phyllis was quite aware that she was indulging in that most contemptible of occupations, self-pity, but the knowledge did not put the mood to flight. Instead

she closed the doors behind her, passed those leading into a guest-room, and her brother Leon's room, then came presently to her own at the opposite end of the house. Ivory-walled, grey-carpeted, with hangings and covers of flowered glazed chintz, spacious and beautiful, the room was all that any girl could desire, and everywhere in it were evidences of beauty and taste. The big round window corresponding to that in the tower room looked eastward almost into the heart of a great chestnut tree that—the first of a row—grew close to the house ; the other looked over the same view as the hall commanded, but of necessity one that was more extensive. A faint warm breeze, flower-scented from the gardens, waved the curtains gently to and fro, a low couch piled with muslin-covered cushions was drawn invitingly near, and suddenly tired she dropped on to it and rested her head against the piled softness.

Hugh's announcement brought back the longing for Gene in double strength. Her desire for the man she had only once seen might be foolish and crazy, but it was vital, and she knew only too well that no other man would ever mean anything to her. Where was he—where could he be in all the great world ? If only she could go back to the States, back to that great lonely West and search for him ! Turning a little, she pressed her cheek into the soft pillow and presently fell asleep through sheer overstrain, to be awakened nearly an hour later by a tall, boyish young figure with bobbed, light-brown hair that turned up like the edges of acanthus leaves round an enchanting young face. Pamela, her eldest Wrexford girl cousin, aged nineteen, who stood in amazed amusement at her side. \*

" Good heavens, Phyllis, do you know it's twenty-past five and you've had no tea ? You promised to play tennis with Leon and me and Gerry. Did you forget ? "

Dismayed, Phyllis sat upright.



"My dear, I'm so sorry! I quite forgot—I'd no intention of going to sleep!"

"Well, hurry up now," was the young girl's advice. "Father has just telephoned to say Uncle Hugh has asked him and mother to dinner. Don't stop to change. Play as you are. I'll go down and order fresh tea for you."

Left alone, Phyllis plunged face and wrists into cold water, feeling that dazed and heavy sensation so often experienced by people unaccustomed to daylight sleeping, then went downstairs and out on to the wide brick terrace just without the drawing-room windows, where tea was set. Two young men in flannels were there, and began promptly to rag her as she appeared, especially the elder of the two, Leon, the brother next in age to herself, who a year ago had returned from rather an unsuccessful career ranching in Arizona, whither he had gone after the war; and Gerald Chalmington, brown-haired, grey-eyed, four- or five-and-twenty in years, was a rather good-looking cousin, brother of Pamela, and son of that Norah and Hilary Chalmington whom Hugh had ridden over to see.

"You're a reliable being, aren't you?" he remarked as Phyllis appeared. "Who was going to play tennis with me at five?"

"Women are faithless creatures," Leon rejoined. "Come on, Gerry. We'll play a single while she gobbles cakes. Bad luck for you, old fella, to have her as a partner—she'll eat so much she won't be able to run!"

They strolled off, two lithe, clean young Englishmen, towards the courts beyond the trees, and Pamela, still curious, turned to her cousin.

"Phyllis—has anything happened? What made you lie down in the first place? You're not ill, are you?"

"No," Phyllis said, "I'm not ill. Yes, Pam—



something rather unexpected has happened. You'll know soon. After dinner probably. Don't ask any questions now, there's a darling."

Pam dropped into a low chair, propped her chin on her hands and stared at her cousin.

"That sounds interesting," she said ; " I'm bursting with curiosity. Come on and play or I can't bear it ! "

And Hugh Chalmington returning from his ride saw his eldest daughter playing a vigorous game of tennis, and felt oddly relieved in mind.

DINNER, half an hour later than usual, was just over, coffee and liqueurs were on the big table where the orange-shaded candles made pools of light on the polished rosewood, the servants had withdrawn, and the windows wide open to the night let in a flood of silver from the moon just risen above the trees.

Around the table sat Hugh, his two daughters Phyllis and Cathleen, his elder son Maurice—crippled since a smash steeple-chasing before the war—his second son Leon, and his elder brother Hilary with his wife Norah and their son Gerald.

Tall, broad of shoulder, yet with the slender straightness of a boy, Cathleen Chalmington, the second girl, possessed a queer kind of loveliness for some people, none at all for others. Her features were cleanly modelled, the eyes, dark grey and very blackly lashed, were undeniably beautiful, but her mouth was too big, the lips had a mournful curve, and the opinion of most people was that her face was too thin and apt to look haggard when she was physically or mentally weary.

She wore her dark hair very smoothly brushed close to her head, the shape of which was perfect, bobbed at the sides and waving a little at the ends, and in a fringe across her forehead—a style she never altered and which suited her as none other would. There was little if any resemblance to her father in her looks, and none at all to her mother, who had been rather short, fair, and blue-eyed; while as to temperament, Cathleen was tor-

mented by her imagination, with nerves like the taut strings of a violin just as readily responsive to good or ill treatment, was secretly romantic and given to periods of dreaming, alternating with fits of tremendous energy.

The conversation at the dinner had ranged widely ; they talked of the various local interests that the brothers had in common—Wrexford was five and a half miles from Little Standingrydge—of the political situation, threatening trouble as usual, but never once of personal matters, and Phyllis tried hard not to be anxious. She wondered nervously when Hugh would think fit to announce his engagement to the family, and it was with a sense of relief that she heard him speak in a slightly louder tone than usual in a moment's slackening of the conversation.

" Cathleen—Maurice—Leon—I have something I want to tell you."

Abrupt silence followed his announcement, the silence that is pregnant with meaning, and Hugh seemed to feel it, for he spoke with an unwonted curtness covering an equally unwonted nervousness.

" I told Phyllis this afternoon," he said, " and since no one was at home I rode over to Wrexford. Now I want to tell you all. I am engaged to be married."

No one spoke. Maurice's eyebrows went up, Cathleen leaned a little forward, her dark eyes very intent, and Hugh spoke again.

" The lady I am about to marry is Lady Walton, Joyce Walton. She is the widow of Phyllis's godfather, Sir Charles Walton, whom you knew well enough by name, and the marriage will take place four weeks to-morrow."

Even to Phyllis, who so thoroughly understood him, the announcement sounded bald, while what it sounded

to the others was evident from the way they received it.

"You haven't chosen to give us much notice," Maurice said in a clear quiet drawl. "Did you think we shouldn't approve?"

"Maurice, how absurd!" It was Norah Chalmington who interrupted hastily. "As if it mattered whether you knew long before or not!"

"Or approved either!" Cathleen said softly. "Perhaps that is what Hugh thought."

"Anyhow we know now," Leon remarked, without startling brilliance and somewhat uncomfortably. "Er—er—when are we to meet her, sir?"

"I am going up to town to-morrow," his father answered abruptly. "And I am expecting her to return with me for the week-end."

"Of course you will bring her to luncheon at Wrexford, Hugh," Norah said. "We shall be so glad to see her."

"Thank you, Norah," Hugh said; and there was an uncomfortable silence, till Phyllis in desperation caught her aunt's eye and rose.

"Shall we sit outside?" she asked as they entered the drawing-room, and Norah Chalmington agreeing, the three went out on to the wide brick path and began pacing slowly along its length to the path that led beyond.

It was Cathleen who spoke first, her voice incredibly bitter.

"Hugh chose his time well. He upholds the tradition of not washing your dirty linen in public."

"Cathleen"—Phyllis's tone was suddenly weary—"why do you take it like that? You know quite well Hugh had no thought of such a thing."

"It was a great surprise to us," Norah put in hastily before Cathleen could answer. "I had no idea Hugh

dreamed of marrying again. Had you, Phyllis? You are his confidante."

Phyllis would never have believed it possible that such words could hurt her, but now, knowing herself shut out from Hugh's intimate thoughts, she could have cried out with the pain. Instead she merely shook her head, thankful that the trees cast a shadow over her face.

"I had no idea either until to-day," she said. "It must have been a very sudden decision."

Norah sighed.

"If only he is happy!" she said. "But Hugh is such a good fellow he'd never see anything little or mean in anyone else. I have an idea I've met Joyce Walton somewhere, but I can't remember where it was. It will make a difference to you all."

"A very great difference," Phyllis agreed. "Lady Walton has a child of about ten—a girl."

"I think Hugh is extremely selfish and rather absurd," Cathleen said in a clear cold voice. "He is fifty and he should have more regard for us. Also it's not decent to admit you can't live without a woman when you're elderly."

In sudden irritation Phyllis turned on her.

"Oh, Cathleen, don't be so stupid!" she exclaimed impatiently. "As if the whole thing weren't trying enough without your playing the offended daughter and making everything worse! Hugh is going to marry again, and that's an end of it. Let's hope she'll make him happy."

"I hope so," Norah interposed, her tone doubtful. "But I confess I'm puzzled myself. It's not like Hugh, this secrecy and haste. Why has he never arranged for us all to meet before? Why has he persistently stayed down here, seeing no one for six months and more? It's absurd, it's not convincing!"

Phyllis flung out her hands in sudden protest.

"It's no good asking me!" she exclaimed. "Hugh has taken the bit between the teeth and bolted. Why on earth must we talk about it any more? We're only running in circles. No one of us can explain anything to the other."

"There's nothing to explain," Cathleen retorted. "Only the usual infatuation of a middle-aged man for a young girl. I suppose Lady Walton is young?"

"How can she be? She has a daughter of ten and she married godfather years before that. I remember hearing about it before I was out of the nursery," Phyllis said irritably. "You seem determined to make trouble, Cathleen."

"It will make itself," was Cathleen's dry answer, and silence fell on the three as they paced slowly up and down the long, wide walk.

There was a heavy dew, and the scents of the garden were poignantly sweet—night-stock and tobacco-plant, fresh earth, wet leaves and turf, while all about them the moonlight lay in sheets of silver splashed here and there with velvet shadow.

The sound of voices broke the silence after a while as the men came out of the dining-room and stood a few minutes talking, then someone suggested bridge. Maurice, Norah Chalmington, Leon, and Phyllis cut in; Cathleen and Gerald did not wish to play, and wandered off quite content to be out-of-doors, and Hugh took his brother on to the path where the chairs and drinks were set at the farther end from the lit drawing-room.

For a short while they sat smoking, content not to talk, Hilary thinking over his brother's action, Hugh's thoughts in a curious medley. He could not be unaware of the latent hostility that his announcement



had awakened in at least two of his children, and he was not at all sure of his sister-in-law's opinion. Not that he cared for the latter. His marriage was his own affair, but he disliked the feeling of antagonism in his children, and like most men he hid a hurt with indifferent temper.

It was Hilary who spoke at last.

"Hugh, how long have you been thinking about this?"

Hugh, starting out of his thoughts, glanced at his brother.

"What? My marriage? All this spring."

Hilary nodded. The reply told him nothing, but he knew his younger brother too well to ask any further direct questions, and it was Hugh, realising something more must be said, who spoke next.

"I have known Joyce some years, as you know," he said. "But I didn't see much of her till last autumn—and then—I met her a good many times—and about Easter I realised what it was. I asked her to marry me just over a week ago."

"And the wedding is in three weeks? Good heavens, Hugh, you're rushing it."

"I'm not a boy likely to change my mind. We both know what we feel—and we've wasted enough of our lives apart. You've been luckier than I—Don't forget that."

And that was all Hilary was to hear of the failure of Hugh's first marriage; the years spent with a woman who was all mother and no wife, who, as he had always believed, had no vestige of intellect, only a placid animal-like pleasure in her prosperity, her seven children and her physical needs. Hugh had married a lovely girl of eighteen when he himself was a boy. He had discovered her to have neither heart nor brain and no whit of humour. She was good-tempered, healthy,

and contentedly stupid, and Hugh had turned in secret desperation to his eldest daughter to receive from her, even as a child, the sympathetic insight, the good comradeship, he had never received from his wife. Hilary had guessed something of the sort, but that was all. And he could not blame Hugh for grasping at the happiness he believed within his reach.

After a little he spoke again, tentatively.

"If you should have other children, Hugh——"

"If I do they will naturally share with the others. Joyce has a daughter Angela about ten; and Walton settled a good deal on her. Charming little girl."

Another silence. Then Hilary made a decision that he had been trying to make ever since he had heard the news.

"Isn't Lady Walton a sister of Donnisthorpe's?" he said, "and therefore of that poor boy Gene Hugon? Does Maurice know that?"

With a quick movement Hugh turned to look at him.

"Yes," he said in some surprise. "But—except for their old friendship—what is it to do with Maurice?"

It was on the tip of Hilary's tongue to say "Everything," but he refrained. The tragedy that had wrecked Gene Hugon's life had broken a close friendship and changed Maurice almost beyond recognition. That his father should be about to marry the only sister of his son's one-time friend was a curious coincidence that Maurice would find it hard to appreciate, and there was yet another and far more delicate reason of which Hilary could not speak. Whether he ever would he did not know, but for his brother's sake he hoped the need might never arise. So now, seeing that Hugh was still awaiting an explanation of his remark, he spoke as lightly as he could.

"It will be disconcerting perhaps," he said. "The memory is a painful one——" He broke off with a shrug, and Hugh uttered an impatient little laugh.

"My dear fellow, that affair is ten years old. Maurice was a mere boy."

"They were great friends," Hilary reminded him. "And the shock was tremendous."

"I know," Hugh said more gravely—"chiefly, I think, of disappointment. Maurice has never once mentioned Gene since the trial. I never understood Gene's action then. To bolt like that after he had stood so much!"

"That was just it," Hilary said quickly. "He could not stand any more. D'you ever see anything of Donnisthorpe?"

"Very seldom. He's hard. He never forgave Gene for the disgrace he brought on the family. However, I shall probably see more of him after my marriage."

The desultory talk drifted off to other things, and presently Cathleen and Gerry came back from their moonlit wandering and they all four joined the bridge-players.

Later, however, when the Wrexford party had gone, and good-nights had been exchanged all round, Phyllis lay long awake listening to the hoot of an owl somewhere in the more distant trees, watching the moonlight creep across the grey carpet, and thinking she had met the one man life held for her. She knew it was folly, perhaps worse. That she knew nothing about him, his temperament, his life, that he was a criminal, caught red-handed, a wild, lawless man of a world utterly apart from her own. And yet those few minutes, that service she had rendered, those secret tears she had seen, had changed the world for her and made her heart ache. To be back in the West! To

be once more in the confines of that enchanted country, bare, hot desert though it might be beneath a burning sun, enchanted so that the cool, sweet greenness and fragrance of her native land was to her neither sweet nor fragrant, but a lonely waste because the man she loved was not in it!

The summer night was so short that the first pearl-tints of the dawn were showing in the east before she slept, and then it was to dream restlessly till she waked to a room flooded with sunshine and a maid placing her tea beside the bed.

Hugh was breakfasting alone when she entered the dining-room, that, facing north, was always cool and shady, and after a few moments' idle conversation she broached the subject of the house alterations, feeling that she needed to keep close to the sane, ordinary things of everyday life if she was not to experience a return of yesterday's self-pity.

"Why don't you come up to town with me?" Hugh said suddenly. "As you say, there are some changes to be made—and I suppose you and the others will want some clothes?"

Phyllis was feminine enough to feel a quickening of interest, but since Hugh was going up by train in an hour and a half's time, she hardly knew whether to go or not.

"Do you mean for the day?" she asked, standing irresolutely by the door, "or to stay?"

"I was going to the club, but if you like I'll have a call put through to your grandmother and see if she can put you up."

"It would give me more time. Yes, I think I will. What about Cathleen—couldn't she come too? She said she wanted to go to the dentist."

The offer was heroic, since Phyllis desired nothing more than her father's sole company; and Cathleen

entering at that moment accepted with no hesitation, swallowed a hasty breakfast, and an hour later was driving to the station with them both.

"It's wicked to be in London on such a morning," Phyllis said as the train ran through the dreary miles of suburbs; "still, we can stay out-of-doors. What are your plans, Hugh?"

"I am busy all day, but I shall dine at grandmother's. You'd better fix things for yourselves, and to-night we'll go to a theatre, so be ready. Want any money?"

"I'm going to buy a new frock and probably a hat," Cathleen remarked. "I'll have all I can, please."

"We'd better be thinking over our clothes for the wedding," Phyllis said. "Are you—is Lady Walton having bridesmaids?"

"No. We want the wedding to be quiet. She is having only her daughter as attendant and probably Judy. I haven't told her yet. To-morrow Joyce will be in town and we will all have lunch together."

They parted at Victoria, the two girls to go on a bus to Bond Street, Hugh to take a taxi to Lincoln's Inn to see his solicitor, and once alone Cathleen resumed the ever-engrossing topic of her father's marriage.

"Who was Joyce Walton before she married Sir Charles?" she asked. "Have we to know a heap of tiresome in-laws, do you think?"

"No. She was one of the Donnisthorpes. Didn't you know? Joyce Hugon—sister of that friend of Maurice's years ago."

"What, the man who was tried for manslaughter? The dancer? I remember it—at least I remember hearing about it. I was in the schoolroom when I first heard that Maurice had come home ill. And then the newspapers. Didn't you ever see them?"

"I was in Paris. Of course I remember hearing about it, because Maurice and Gene Hugon were such



friends. I never met him. Let's get down here to look at the shops."

They spent a delightful hour prowling around Bond Street and the streets adjacent, lunched after the fashion of their kind at Gunter's, and started to search for the clothes they wanted in the purlieus of Shaftesbury Avenue, and arrived at their grandmother's house in Portland Place in a taxi surrounded by boxes and parcels.

Old Mrs. Chalmington's house, which would in course of time pass to Hilary, was on the western side of that important-looking street—a large, ugly stucco house, its interior a pleasing contrast in its comfort to its outer appearance, and on this hot May afternoon pleasantly cool after the glaring streets.

The butler, as severe and elderly as every living creature in the house, took in the numerous parcels with quite a cheerful air, which the advent of his mistress's granddaughters usually produced, asked after "Miss Judy," who was his favourite despite the appalling tricks she played on him, and then conducted them up the wide Adams stairway, throwing open the drawing-room door with an air.

"Miss Chalmington, Miss Cathleen Chalmington!"

The room before them was large and lofty, lit by three long windows and full of light from the reflection on the opposite houses; its furniture principally of the mid-Victorian days was solid, hideous, and extremely good, the carpet was a much-flowered Wilton, velvet-soft to the tread if offensive to the modern eye, but the room was redeemed from too great ugliness by its masses of flowers.

Near one of the windows in the chair she invariably occupied sat their widowed grandmother, an imposing figure despite her eighty years, rather stout, extremely upright and dignified in her carriage, with snow-white



hair piled up and back after a by-gone fashion from her face, which despite its worn lines showed still the traces of beauty.

She laid aside *The Morning Post* as her grand-daughters were announced and held out her hand, her keen blue eyes softening.

"How do you do, Phyllis my dear ; how do you do, Cathleen ? "

She greeted them in turn, receiving their kisses with great dignity, and waved them to chairs after a swift glance that took in every detail of their appearance ; and Phyllis, who was devoted to her, spoke first.

"It was so kind of you to put us up at such short notice, grandmamma," she said. "Do you mind us being rather late ? We've been shopping."

"Not in the least. You shall pour out tea and tell me what you have bought. Clothes for the wedding, I suppose."

Phyllis checked a little sigh of relief. She had rather dreaded, why she did not know, mentioning the affair of Hugh's marriage to his mother. As it was, Mrs. Chalmington read her thoughts almost before she knew them herself, and spoke briskly.

"I suppose you're all disturbed and none too pleased about it," she remarked. "Cathleen, my dear, you look as if you had a great deal to say in the matter. Let me hear you."

Cathleen, who had not the least fear of the rather formidable old lady, shrugged her shoulders and spoke quite frankly.

"I am certainly not overwhelmed with joy," she said. "I consider Hugh ought to be able to live without a woman at his age—he's done so for eight years. At least we *suppose* he has. And it will not be very pleasant for us having a stepmother in authority in the household."

Mrs. Chalmington put up her long single eyeglass and favoured her granddaughter with an intent stare.

"So this is the modern passion for calling a spade a spade, is it?" she remarked, her tone not unlike ice. "I admire frankness, my dear Cathleen, but in the young it is apt to degenerate into vulgarity. Watch the tendency. It is not attractive."

Cathleen's dark eyes under their strong curving brows met the rather terrible look serenely.

"You asked for my opinion, grandmamma," she said; "I'm sorry if I expressed it too bluntly. But after all it's the truth, isn't it? And I imagine that the truth is the most important thing in the matter of marriage."

"So it is. But you phrase the truth rather crudely. I suppose it is the modern idea—and I prided myself on being modern! Phyllis, you will feel the change most, I imagine. Have you seen your father's fiancée yet?"

Phyllis, drinking fragrant China tea, shook her head.

"Not yet. We are all to lunch together to-morrow at the Berkeley, I think. You know her, grandmamma?"

"I know her, and she is a charming, kindly, attractive woman. You are really fortunate, my dears, if you only knew it. I don't agree with Cathleen in the least."

"I can't lunch to-morrow," Cathleen said, with rather startling suddenness: "I've an engagement."

It was Phyllis's turn to stare.

"An engagement? When—I mean——"

She broke off the question abruptly, for her sister's expression warned her, but the knowledge was disconcerting all the same. To permit oneself another

engagement when such a meeting was arranged was not only discourteous, but unwise.

"Hugh will be annoyed," she thought, but aloud said only: "If you have arranged it of course it's your affair. I bought two frocks to-day, grandmother. Really rather lovely. May I have them in here and show you?"

Mrs. Chalmington seemed relieved at the change of subject, and in a few moments was looking at the day's purchases. A dance frock of palest jade georgette beautifully embroidered in silver, another for day of blue, a white drooping hat with hanging white and orange ribbon, and a straight soft frock of palest flame bought by Cathleen for herself. There were one or two other things. White buckskin shoes, high of heel and dainty of cut, a hyacinth-blue jumper, a tennis frock of yellow and white, and several pairs of stockings and gloves. In all, both Phyllis and Cathleen had had a day thoroughly satisfactory to any girls, and it was with a sense of extravagance, guilty but pleasant, that Phyllis went down to the seven-o'clock dinner before the theatre.

Her perceptions were always acute, but looking back to the early hours of the evening she wondered why no sixth sense warned her of the thing that was to come, why she had received no warning of what was about to happen. As it was, she stood alone for a moment or two in the shadowy room looking down on the wide, deserted street, glad of the faint breeze that stirred the net curtains at the windows, idly wondering why Mrs. Chalmington was so economical with lights.

Her sister, looking exotic and arresting in a straight, sleeveless frock of gold-embroidered scarlet brocade, came in rather listlessly, and snatching the opportunity Phyllis spoke.

"Cathleen, for heaven's sake break any engagement you've made for luncheon to-morrow. It's frightfully rude of you if you don't."

"I'm not interested in Joyce Walton," Cathleen rejoined, glancing into the street as Phyllis had done, "and I promised Paul Wildringham to lunch with him at the Embassy."

"But Hugh—it's such a slight. My dear, you can't. You absolutely can't. Lunch with Wildringham any other day if you want to—though I think he's an objectionable creature—but don't deliberately choose to-morrow."

"I have chosen," Cathleen said. "Don't try to make me change my arrangements, Phyllis. It's quite useless. I'm not pleased about this marriage, and I don't intend to let my father's second wife upset my life. Why should she? If she's sensible she won't want to. If she's not—well, then the sooner she learns to understand me the better. I will be quite amiable when we have to meet, but that meeting is to be when it is convenient to me."

"But Hugh!" Phyllis exclaimed. "It will hurt Hugh."

"It will annoy him," Cathleen said, with a quiet little smile, and suddenly looked at her sister with odd directness. "You know quite well that nothing I could do would hurt him. Only you—or Maurice—have the power to do that. Has it never occurred to you how completely Hugh has shut all the rest of us out of his life?"

Phyllis, disturbed by the sudden question which showed an attitude of mind she had no idea existed in her sister, made no immediate reply, and a moment later the subject of their conversation entered the room.

"I've seats for the Globe," he said; "hope you'll

like the show. Ah, mother, how are you? It's very good of you to let us invade you like this!"

He went forward to greet Mrs. Chalmington, who looked like a Frenchwoman of the old régime with her high-piled snowy hair and the black velvet and old lace of her dinner gown.

"I have been highly entertained by the invasion," she said. "How are you, my dear? We are dining quite alone since your visit is unexpected, but I have one or two people coming to luncheon to-morrow to meet Lady Walton, so I hope you will lunch here instead of at the Berkeley."

"My dear mother!" Touched and surprised, Hugh's voice showed his pleasure. "How very good of you! I should be only too delighted if it won't prove too much of a strain for you."

"Certainly not. I'm remarkably well. This heat suits me, and it is more fitting that the luncheon should be at my house. A quarter to two o'clock."

Phyllis glanced at Cathleen, but Cathleen's face was blank. Surely she could not be so foolishly obstinate as to adhere to her intention of lunching at the Embassy and put so public a slight upon the woman her father was to marry. Yet knowing her, Phyllis was painfully anxious and all through dinner was more distraite than her wont.

They drove in a taxi to the theatre through the broad daylight of the streets, met some friends in the vestibule, and went to the box Hugh had taken. The curtain went up almost immediately they had entered, and the play was a good one and absorbed their attention till the interval, and then after the usual discussion and comment Phyllis looked round the house.

It was fairly full despite the beauty of the weather, and she saw several people she knew, then, her glance

roving carelessly over the stalls, she gave a sudden start and her heart felt as though it had stopped beating, for in the gangway stall of the fourth row, leaning back and looking in front of him with the detached air of one whose thoughts are far away, sat the man she had last seen a prisoner in the hands of the law in the New Mexican desert.



"I'm sorry—yes—what did you say, Hugh?"

Forcing herself to the realisation of her surroundings, Phyllis turned to her father, to see him regarding her with a puzzled frown, and realised too that she had not the slightest idea what he had said or how often he had said it.

"I'm sorry," she repeated; "I was thinking of something else."

"Apparently," Hugh said dryly. "The worst of it is that my remark was not worth repeating. Do you like the play? Do you think the girl—what's her name—Thelma—was right?"

"To stick to him?" Phyllis's senses were alert enough now, despite the trembling nerves she could not entirely control. "Yes, every time. Love is not love if it fails at the critical moment."

"The critical moment is rather a severe test  
Forgery."

An odd little shiver convulsed Phyllis. Beside what she herself had seen of the life of the man she loved, forgery seemed an insignificant crime. And sitting there in the crowded theatre, the utter impossibility of her feelings came over her. Here was a man of whom she knew only one good thing, a man of a different race, who on the only occasion of their meeting had shown himself a criminal, ungrateful, surly, fierce, his hands stained with the blood of his fellow-men. It was incredible that she could care for

such a man, incredible that he could in any way have aroused a feeling in her heart that years of separation had neither killed nor weakened. Yet the memory of that moment remained when, believing himself unobserved, he had shown himself not so hard as he appeared; when he had given way for one instant to some overwhelming anguish of mind—an anguish inspired by something far deeper than mere despair at his capture, that she knew by some intuition inexplicable even to herself. And she had sensed then, and nothing had shaken the knowledge it had brought her, that beneath the defiant bitterness of his manner was something great, setting him apart from his fellows in crime.

The curtain was up, the lights were down, and knowing she would not be observed she looked down at the stalls. There he was, next to an elderly woman but evidently not with her, and even in the half-light she knew herself not mistaken. It was "Black Ramsden." The cinema-like name brought a faint little smile to her lips, so remote and unlikely did that whole scene appear to her now, seated in a crowded London theatre. And then suddenly into her mind flashed the question of meeting. How could she get speech with him, how recall herself to his memory even if some fortuitous circumstance made such an unlikely meeting possible? She could hardly claim acquaintance—the idea was ludicrous despite its hint of tragedy—yet now after all these years it would be more than she could bear to lose him once again. . . . Looking back afterwards on her state of mind, it seemed to her that she must have been possessed by some amazing personality other than her own. Yet she was quite set on her course quite determined that come what would she must contrive somehow to recall herself to him. If then he were indifferent, the end

would of necessity have come to all her dreams and hopes. But he could not be. He could not have forgotten. He could not be wholly devoid of some sense of tenderness or gratitude.

"There's Paul."

Cathleen's low, clear voice jarred on Phyllis's nerves like a physical blow, and shivering she came back to the present and realised that the play was over and that she knew nothing whatever about it; and it was with a sense of daze, as though she had come abruptly out of a heavy sleep, that she rose to slip on her white Chinese shawl, following Cathleen's gesture to a box opposite.

Paul Wildringham was a man of middle age, handsome in a heavy way, the idol of a certain set of *précieuses* in town, and latterly Cathleen had been seeing quite a good deal of him. She expected some remonstrance now, but instead Phyllis seemed indifferent and only anxious to get out of the theatre; and in a minute or two they were in the vestibule and Hugh had gone out to look for the car.

Wildringham came out talking to several people, saw Cathleen and broke away to speak to her, and at that instant, curiously indifferent to the crowd around him, Gene Ramsden came through the swing door leading from the stalls, into the crowded foyer.

In another moment her chance would be gone, Hugh would be back, Cathleen would turn from Wildringham. . . . Shivering all over, yet outwardly giving no sign save pallor, Phyllis slipped through a knot of waiting people and stood directly before him.

Just at that instant owing to the press of people he had to stand still, and in that instant she spoke, her voice low, eager, a little unsteady.

"Mr. Ramsden—it is you, isn't it?"

Stiffening like a man who had been shot, he swung round to see who used that name, and his eyes met hers, the same fierce, brilliant grey eyes in the hard, lean face that she so well remembered, and in that second's pause the appalling thing she had done came home to Phyllis. He stared at her without speaking, and she felt the blood pounding to suffocation in ears and throat, felt her knees trembling, realised that he was staring at her with less insolent boldness and more perplexity.

"Yes—why"—the flash of something half-remembered, half-forgotten came to him, passed, and staring he smiled. "Yes, I guess it is," he said in a slow drawl. "But——"

He paused, and subconsciously Phyllis realised that in another second Hugh would be at her side, and snatched at her opportunity with the courage of desperation.

"You remember? You——"

But he cut her short, not even seeming to hear her words.

"I must see you to-morrow—where—how?"

"In the park—by the Serpentine, the opposite side to the Row, at eleven."

The answer was as swift as his question, as though all her life she had been accustomed to making such clandestine appointments; afterwards she thought in bewildered amazement that she must have been mad or dreaming. The next instant Cathleen was touching her arm with the words, "Hugh's got the car," and she stumbled rather than walked through the thinning crowd, across the pavement into the waiting car.

Her mind was a veritable chaos, she was trembling all over, thankful for the darkness, yet desperately aware that at all costs she must pull herself together if she did not want both Hugh and her sister to know

what had happened. Fortune favoured her, for Cathleen began speaking of Wildringham; and Hugh, who disliked him intensely, was eloquent enough on the subject to draw an indignant protest from his daughter, thus giving Phyllis time to recover at least her outward self-possession. And by the time Portland Place was reached she had regained a surface calmness, and pleading great fatigue went straight up to her room.

Once there she undressed with feverish haste, longing only for the darkness that she might at leisure think over the amazing, incredible thing that had happened, but scarcely had she switched off the light when there came a knock at the door and Hugh entered very softly. At sight of his tall figure, dimly discernible by the white shirt-front, she spoke:

"I'm not asleep. Did you want me?"

He came to the side of the bed with a quick, silent movement.

"You looked so white when we came in that I was anxious for you," he said. "Are you sure you're all right, Phyl? Only a headache?"

"Not even that!" she assured him. "I'm quite fit, Hugh darling, but I'm dreadfully tired and bed just called to me. By the way," she was amazed to find how easily she could be casual, "I met a man at the theatre I knew slightly in America. A Mr. Ramsden. Rather nice."

"Did you? Better ring him up and ask him to join us at lunch to-morrow. Certain you're all right, sweetheart?"

"Certain!"

"Very well then. God bless you, good night!"

"Good night."

He bent over and kissed her, went out of the room and closed the door, and Phyllis left alone lay gazing



at the dim square of the window to compose her thoughts as best she might. Hugh's approaching marriage, the meeting with her future stepmother, Cathleen's defection from the luncheon—all had sunk into insignificance beside the personal element that dwarfed all else. Gene Ramsden had come back into her life, curiously altered, no longer in ragged, rough cowboy clothes all stained with blood and dust, but in correct evening dress, exactly groomed like any other man of her world yet subtly different in the bronzed leanness of his face, the fierce eyes and cruel mouth, the sense of the wild and its elemental strength, latent in his whole personality.

Utterly weary yet vividly awake Phyllis lay staring wide-eyed into the darkness, longing for sleep. The occasional passing of a belated car or taxi disturbed her, used as she was to the deep quiet of the country, and the dawn seemed to come with relentless haste. Her eyes smarted with fatigue, her physical tiredness increased with each minute, yet sleep was farther off than ever, and the maid bringing her tea at eight o'clock found her heavy-eyed and pale.

Her bath restored some of her customary vitality, and she was down soon after nine, longing for yet dreading the hour of eleven.

About half-past ten Cathleen strolled into the morning room.

"I've just left a message for Hugh," she remarked on seeing her sister; "he was out before I came down. Hullo! Are you going out?"

"Yes," Phyllis said, trying to speak casually. "Can't you get back for lunch, Cathleen? It will upset grandmamma as well as Hugh, and it's so needless."

She knew the appeal was useless, for Cathleen always took her own path, but she felt in duty bound to make



it, and having made it cast aside all future responsibility, and at a quarter to eleven went out into the hot, unshaded sunshine of Portland Place. She was afraid of being too early, but at the corner by the Langham, fearful of being too late, she took a taxi, and at eleven exactly climbed the little slope of the path from the Row and crossed the eastern Serpentine bridge. The north side of the water was as usual almost deserted, but he was there before her, pacing up and down, his slow, easy walk, careless yet lithe as a panther's, marking him out from his fellows.

She saw him and caught her breath in a little gasp, and almost at the same moment he turned and saw her, slender and rather tall in her clinging white frock and drooping blue hat, and the blood rushed to his head, making his brain swim. The next moment she was close beside him holding out her hand.

Five minutes later they were seated under the shade of a tree a little back from the road, like any ordinary couple, and Gene after staring at her for a minute began to talk.

"I've only been in England two days," he said, "and last night I went to the theatre because I'd nothing better to do. . . . How did you know me again?"

The habit of years stood him in good stead now. Last night the use of his name had so violently startled him that for the moment he had been shaken out of his customary cool control; but thinking the episode over later he had realised more of the impossibility of the situation than she had, and had realised too that if he wished to bury his past life he must not permit himself to be so completely thrown off his balance. She was not the kind of girl to be treated as he was used to treating women, even though he did not know

in the least who she was. He could see that, yet on the other hand she had arranged the meeting in the park with the utmost readiness, had been quite willing to believe that he remembered her as clearly as she evidently remembered him—and for long he had puzzled over some memory that persisted in eluding him, had been tormented by a half-remembered likeness, a vague remembrance. At last he became aware that she was expecting him to speak, and banishing his perplexity he spoke the first words that came into his head.

“ Do you live in London ? ”

The question was so commonplace that for the moment she was taken aback, then answered it with almost indecent haste :

“ No. At Little Standingrydge, Hampshire. I am staying with my grandmother till this afternoon. And that brings me to my real errand. I told my father last night—he was at the theatre—that I had met you in America and he wishes to know if you will lunch with us at my grandmother’s at half-past one. It is quite a small party.”

Gene found himself staring at her in perplexity. Who was she—what was she ? Where in all the past sordid tangle of the last ten years had he met her ? And then realising that she was still awaiting his answer in some pardonable surprise, he pulled up his questing thoughts.

“ I—I’m sure sorry,” he said, relapsing unconsciously into the American turn of phrase, “ but I can’t. I—did you say Hampshire ? ”

Emotion in Phyllis was giving way to bewilderment not untinged with dismay ; his manner was so strange, yet his words were so commonplace that she could almost believe she had made a mistake, that he was not the same man whom she had seen last, bound and

a prisoner, in the hands of the law in the far-off New Mexican desert, yet all the while she knew such a mistake was impossible, even without his start of amazement at her use of his name. Yet now at his long silence, his sudden refusal of her invitation, and his equally sudden question she found herself utterly at a loss.

"Yes. My father's mother. Mr. Ramsden"—quite suddenly she forced herself to face the truth—"you don't remember me. You've tried to, but you don't. I am Phyllis Chalmington . . . and even now I don't believe my name conveys anything to you."

A fluffy collie pup came lolloping up to them and she bent down to fondle it, wondering dully why he did not speak, and Gene, all his idle amusement at the situation dead in him, sat staring at her with eyes that hardly seemed to see. His brain was swimming, the name seemed to beat upon his raw nerves, the warm summer air seemed as though it would stifle him. He must have made some sound, for Phyllis sat upright and looked at him, the colour dying out of her face.

"You don't remember," she said slowly; "then what must you think of me—a stranger to you—coming here this morning? Why didn't you tell me? Why did you let me think last night that you knew me again?"

Her voice threatened an ignominious tremble; her one desire was to get away anywhere from this man who had not only forgotten her existence, but allowed her to place herself in a situation of extreme discomfort, for his own amusement. It hurt her desperately, but he must not, should not see it, and without waiting for any answer she got up and went quickly away along the path, only conscious of the supreme necessity

of flight unless she wished him to be still more amused.

A minute later she felt a hand catch her arm in a grip of steel, and staring round she found him beside her, his face grim and rather pale beneath its bronze.

"You said your name was Chalmington," he said, with no attempt at explanation or apology. "Do you know Hugh Chalmington?"

"He is my father," she said quite quietly. "Why do you ask?"

His grip loosened on her arm instantly. Falling back a step, he stood looking at her, and when at last he spoke his voice was hoarse.

"I knew your father—years ago," he said slowly, as if choosing his words, "and your brother—Maurice. Why did you call me Ramsden last night? Where did you meet me in America? My name is not Ramsden."

Phyllis no longer wanted to get away, all she wanted was to straighten the extraordinary tangle that seemed to envelop her. Yet some queer instinct held her back from recalling herself to his memory or the true circumstances of their meeting. Frowning a little, she spoke with a tinge of impatience.

"You were certainly known to me as Ramsden—Gene Ramsden," she said. "But I only met you once, six years ago. You have forgotten me and it doesn't matter. Only last night I was so surprised to see you over here I had to speak."

He watched her all through the speech, his eyes never leaving hers, and when she ended he spoke very quietly.

"That is not true," he said. "You had some other reason for speaking. . . . My name is not Ramsden. It is Hugon. Gene Hugon. . . ."

For a moment there was an absolute silence, the

silence of utter consternation on her part, of savage resentment on his. Then he spoke again.

"I landed the night before last. . . . I lied to you at the theatre. I didn't remember you, but you spoke to me and I pretended that I did because I was bored and alone and you were pretty. You say you knew me as Ramsden—I suppose that is so, but I don't remember you even now. But you know who I am, and I beg your pardon for letting you come here under false pretences."

He broke off, looking down at her with intent frowning gaze, for although he had just said he did not remember, yet in some remote way her face and her eyes—in particular her eyes—seemed vaguely reminiscent. He realised too that, Fate having chosen to play this trick on him, there was nothing for it but to tell the truth and take himself off, so without waiting for Phyllis to speak he lifted his hat, said abruptly:

"I'm going now. I'm sure sorry I've behaved like this," and without another look at her swung off down a sidepath at a rapid pace.

As for Phyllis, she was so taken aback that she could only stare after him till his tall figure was hidden from sight, and then drop helplessly on to a chair and try to realise what the whole amazing matter meant.

Black Ramsden and Gene Hugon—Gene Hugon, brother of Lord Donnisthorpe and of Joyce Walton. Hugh's fiancée! It was incredible! Unthinkable! And yet he himself had said it—he had told her in the plainest, bluntest way that he and that dusty blood-stained captured robber were one and the same . . . only he had no notion of the circumstances of their strange first meeting. Thinking it over now she wondered why she had not told him. It would have been so much simpler to explain her action both in



speaking to him last night and in agreeing to meet him this morning.

He would have understood her amazement if he had known that the only time they had met before was when he was captured and practically under sentence of death. As it was, he might believe that former meeting only existed in her imagination—save that he had started so violently at being addressed by the name of Ramsden, thereby revealing the fact that it had been his name while in America.

And he was Donnisthorpe's brother ! The man whom Maurice had thought his staunch friend ! Her thoughts swung off to the past when, as a girl finishing her education in Paris, rumours had come to her of the public disgrace of one of Maurice's fellow-officers who was also his great friend. She had never heard details. The whole affair had not sufficiently interested her, since she was far away, never saw the English papers, and only knew the Donnisthorpe family by reason of the fact that Donnisthorpe Castle was about ten miles from Standingrydge. She knew that Gene Hugon had left the country, that he had utterly disappeared from the knowledge of both friends and family—what she did not know was the cause of the tragedy, and that she determined to find out as soon as possible.

A sudden fear that it must be late roused her to look at the time and discover it nearly a quarter to one, which discovery sent her hurrying across the path to Stanhope Gate and a taxi. With Cathleen absent it would never do for her to be late on this day of all days, and trying to put the disturbing thought of Gene out of her head she arrived at Portland Place just in time to rush upstairs, change into another frock and descend, outwardly cool and composed, to the drawing-room to meet Hugh's future wife.

Mrs. Chalmington sat in her accustomed place



near one of the windows. Talking to her was an old friend, General Wrightson, whom Phyllis had known all her life, and a tall grey-haired man with an eyeglass, whom, with something of a shock, she recognised as Lord Donnisthorpe himself.

She stood talking to him for a few moments, wondering at the back of her mind what he would say if he could know her morning's occupation ; then two other guests came in, and last, Hugh and with him a woman not very tall, inclined to roundness of figure, beautifully dressed and charming to look upon.

Fair but with more of a bronze-gold fairness than Phyllis herself, pretty, with grey-blue eyes that were radiant with happiness, Joyce Walton was irresistible to any generous temperament, and Phyllis gave a little sigh of relief. Since Hugh had to fall in love, he had at least fallen in love wisely !

Lady Walton greeted Mrs. Chalmington and the others, then turned to Hugh and came across to Phyllis, who stood a little apart, waiting for him to introduce them, and searching her face intently for any likeness to Gene.

" This is my eldest daughter, Phyllis," Hugh said and laid his hand lightly for a moment on her arm.

" Phyllis my dear, this is Lady Walton."

" Joyce, please," Joyce Walton said, taking Phyllis's outstretched hand. " We had better take the plunge at once, hadn't we, as regards Christian names ? If we don't I shall do it inadvertently, I know, because Hugh is always talking of you."

She spoke lightly, thus robbing her words of any effusiveness ; her manner was easy, but Phyllis, unexpectedly nervous herself, could see the signs of nervousness in her, and, quick to respond to the unspoken appeal in the other's eyes, she bent her head and kissed Joyce on the cheek.

"Yes," she said, her voice full and sweet, "I hope you will be very happy with us all. I know you will with Hugh!"

She felt rather than saw Hugh's look of pleasure—she seldom kissed anyone but him—and was rewarded by feeling him catch her hand as they all went downstairs together, and press it for an instant against his lips, and then found herself at table seated between General Wrightson and a rather famous K.C., Handley Marshall.

Mrs. Chalmington, despite her age, was an excellent hostess, and the luncheon was very perfect, like all her entertaining; the food was exquisite, the wine no whit behind it, the conversation interesting; and when Hugh had seen Joyce Walton into her car, and re-entered the house, he felt entirely satisfied with the day with the single exception of Cathleen.

He was an even-tempered man and an indulgent and modern parent, but Cathleen's behaviour in deliberately absenting herself from what was after all a formal introduction to her future step-mother had roused in him a rare anger. So much so that he put off an appointment and waited for her, since she had left word that she should be back at four o'clock.

As her taxi drew up Phyllis went in the morning-room, to see Hugh put down the paper, throw away his cigarette, and rise from his comfortable chair—just time to say "Don't be too angry, Hugh," when Cathleen strolled in, a picturesque figure in a white dress with a loose scarlet girdle of cut beads, and a big scarlet hat on her dark head.

"Jones says you want me," she said, glancing from one to the other. "What is it?"

Hugh's jaw set in a way Phyllis knew meant trouble.

"Yes," he said, with a quietness that should have

warned her, "I do. Will you kindly explain to me why you accepted an invitation for luncheon knowing you were expected to be present here?"

At his tone she lifted her eyebrows, and the action angered him to sudden unwonted expression.

"I will not have impertinence," he said harshly. "Kindly remember that you are my daughter even if I choose to permit you unwonted freedom. And I will not tolerate such rudeness as you have to-day been guilty of. What have you to say for yourself?"

Cathleen's listless attitude did not change at his unexpected attack, but Phyllis watching closely saw her eyes narrow and her jaw set as rigidly as his.

"I had no idea you would be so annoyed," she said indifferently; "you usually allow us to make luncheon engagements if we choose."

"You knew your grandmother was giving a luncheon for Lady Walton."

"Yes."

"Very well then, you knew quite well that you were expected to be present. Your action in staying away was intended as a deliberate insult to my future wife, and as such I intend to regard it. If you do not choose to regard my wishes, I shall not regard yours. Lord Donnisthorpe is giving a small dance at his house to-night for Lady Walton. Phyllis and yourself were particularly invited. You will be good enough to sit down at that table and write a note excusing yourself. Give what reason you choose, but tell Donnisthorpe you regret not being able to come."

"Hugh——!"

Phyllis bit back the words that rushed to her lips, and for a moment the silence in the room was tense, then Cathleen moved over to the writing-table and without a word wrote the desired note. She was habitually

pale, but now her face was ashen and her very lips colourless as Hugh took the note, glanced through it, and handed it back.

"Yes, that will do," he said, and at the brevity of his acknowledgment of her obedience Cathleen's temper flared; reaching the door she swung round on him, her eyes blazing.

"So this is what your marriage means for us!" she cried, her voice shaking. "I guessed as much! You have fallen in love and you mean to make us pay for it. . . . You may enforce my obedience, but that is all you ever shall enforce, and you may as well know it. You never loved any of us but Phyllis, and now you wonder why we are not all rushing to fling our arms round our future stepmother—and when we go on our usual way you turn on us as if we were in the nursery! I suppose that that's the way you treated mother—I don't wonder she died—she was lucky—I wish I were dead too!"

Her voice, passionate and fierce, broke suddenly; she wrenched open the door, there was a flash of white and scarlet, then the door banged and Phyllis and Hugh were alone.

Silence followed her exit, a silence of utter consternation on the part of Phyllis; then Hugh uttered a short laugh.

"Cathleen evidently does not intend to leave me in ignorance of her feelings," he said. "D'you care for a walk? We might go to Regent's Park."

She assented, not because she wanted to, for she was already tired with the emotional strain of the day's happenings, but because she wanted to be with him, and in a few minutes they were walking up Portland Place in an unaccustomed silence.

It was not till they were under the chestnut-trees of the Broad Walk that Hugh spoke, then not of

the incident just over, but of something even more disconcerting.

"This fellow you met last night—he didn't come to luncheon."

"No. He—he had an engagement. We only spoke for a minute or two."

"Was he a friend of Walton's? Where did you meet him?"

She was quite aware that Hugh was not asking these questions with any desire of making things difficult, but all the same they needed an answer and she could not find it in her heart to lie.

"I—no—I think not. We met on the Los Angeles-Chicago train."

She was feverishly turning over in her mind the wisdom of telling him part at least of her knowledge. Since Gene Ramsden and Gene Hugon were one and the same, it was almost a foregone conclusion that Hugh should discover she knew him, and a further meeting, since he was Joyce's brother, was certain.

She had been so accustomed to giving Hugh her fullest confidence that silence on a matter that concerned her so vitally was not only distasteful, but difficult. Yet once involved in an explanation there was no knowing where she might be led, and finally she determined for the time being to say nothing as the safest plan.

Hugh was very silent. It was obvious to Phyllis that Cathleen's outburst had disturbed him, but he did not seem inclined to discuss it and their companionship seemed to have lost something of its completeness. Already Phyllis could feel the barrier, intangible and unwanted by them both, that his approaching marriage had built, and the sense of it depressed her beyond words. She was tired with all she had experienced, and back of everything was the knowledge that she was

keeping thoughts at bay. Not yet must she permit herself to survey the morning's happenings, to realise what Gene's attitude to her had been . . . and every time her thoughts turned to him she drove them sternly back till such time as she should be completely alone.



LITTLE Standingrydge lay sleeping in the afternoon sunlight as Leon Chalmington came in sight of it over the brow of the hill on his way back from luncheon at Hilary's, three days later. It was very hot, and every leaf and flower was at its height of bloom, as if the sun had drawn out the deepest tints of colour from every blossom and painted the landscape in the rich hues of July when May was yet but ten days old.

He was riding a chestnut that by rights belonged jointly to Phyllis and Cathleen, a big, lazy, good-tempered mare with the capacity for keeping up an unwearied trot for many miles, refusing ever to be hurried beyond it. Towards the top of the ridge of land sheltering the long slope on which Little Standingrydge Manor was built, from the north, Tarlatan slowed to a walk just as a car came up behind her and a voice called :

" Good day, Leon. Glad to see you back again."

Leon turned to see the open Wolseley close beside him, and pulled Tarlatan to a standstill, even as the chauffeur halted the car. The occupants were neighbours—a retired soldier, General Daltry, a hard-bitten, grey-moustached man of five or six and fifty, and his wife, a well-preserved, well-dressed woman of about the same age, whom the Chalmingtons as a family cordially disliked.

" How d'you do, sir ? How d'you do, Mrs. Daltry ? Hot, isn't it ? "

"Excessively. Have you been far?"

Leon sat back in the saddle, smiling at her direct question—Mrs. Daltry's interest in the doings of her acquaintances was proverbial.

"Not very. I've been lunching at my uncle's house," he said, quite ready to gratify her if it did not interfere with his wishes. "Why don't you drive over there to tea? My aunt is simply dying to talk to someone!"

"About the wedding, I suppose. Dear me, how surprising it all is! I hear that Lady Walton is a sister of Lord Donnisthorpe's. Is that so?"

"It is. She's coming to stay at the Castle in a day or two. Quite exciting the neighbourhood, isn't it?"

"Your father's friends naturally take an interest in his second marriage," Mrs. Daltry rejoined rather stiffly—she had sometimes an uncomfortable suspicion that Leon was laughing at her—then curiosity getting the better of dignity she went on talking.

"I was at the station yesterday meeting my niece, and I heard from the station-master—most respectable man, Edwards—that Lord Donnisthorpe's brother had returned. Do you know if that is so?"

Leon's eyebrows went up in amazement.

"What? Gene?" he exclaimed. "No. Has he? He was a very great friend of my brother Maurice's—what was it?—some years ago."

He broke off, recollecting rather uncomfortably that Daltry had been Gene Hugon's commanding officer during his brief military career, and changed the subject by asking if Mrs. Daltry knew Joyce Walton, then said he must not spoil their drive, and put Tarlatan to a swift trot up the remainder of the hill, much to that lady's annoyance and surprise.

Covering the last mile home his thoughts turned persistently to Gene, and, as his recollection of the scandal that had evidently taken place was anything

but clear, he determined to ask his father for the story, since its protagonist had once more appeared on the scene. He would have been still more interested had he heard the conversation between the husband and wife he had just left, for Mrs. Daltry at once pounced on the subject of Gene's return.

"I do hope Mr. Chalmington will not allow his daughters to meet that young man," she exclaimed. "He holds such extraordinary ideas. Let's them call him by his Christian name! I never heard anything so disrespectful—and he is quite likely to receive Mr. Hugon at the Manor."

"I don't quite see how he can do anything else considering he is marrying Hugon's sister," her husband replied. "Besides, it's not our affair."

"Indeed it is the affair of every woman to protest against the conduct of such people as Gene Hugon! If Mr. Chalmington receives him I shall consider it my duty to look after those motherless girls and do my best to protect them."

"You'd better leave it alone," Daltry said, pulling at his short moustache. "They're not children."

"They are inexperienced, brought up in a sheltered home. No, Hubert, I know my duty. I was a friend of their dear mother's."

"You take it for granted that Hugon will behave badly," her husband remarked, and she waved her hands in protest.

"What reason have I for expecting the contrary? A leopard cannot change its spots. You remember that American friend of yours who when he saw that photograph taken years ago with the Dowager declared that it was the same man as the notorious raider who had been wanted by the U.S. police for years? Remember that, Hubert, when you counsel me to stand aside."

"You can't prove that," Daltry said uneasily. "After all it might very well be a mistake—most likely was. Newspaper photographs are misleading enough at any time."

Mrs. Daltry closed her lips in a tight line that her husband knew well, and being a wise man where domestic peace was concerned, he discreetly changed the subject by remarking :

"Perhaps Donnisthorpe will not have him to the Castle. That's a very charming hat you have on, my dear. Where did you get it?"

So it came about that Gene Hugon's arrival was heralded widely and somewhat in the nature of a great event in the neighbourhood ; the last thing he would have desired had he once given it a thought.

As for Leon, interested and annoyed by his forgetfulness, he bore the thought of Gene in mind, and later finding his father in a deck-chair watching Phyllis, Cathleen, Gerry Chalmington, and Judy playing a vigorous set, dropped down on the grass beside him.

"You playing?" he asked, glancing at Hugh's flannels. "Care for a single?"

"Presently. I promised Judy to watch her for a bit. She's doing something queer with her service. Don't know what it is. Hilary say anything about that note I sent?"

"He said he'd see about it, but he believed they were asking too high a price for such poor land," Leon answered absently. "I met the Daltrys on the way home."

"Dreadful woman!" Hugh ejaculated. "Tongue like a viper."

"She didn't have a chance to say much except that Gene Hugon was expected home—or was home. I wasn't sure which."

"Indeed? That rather surprises me. Gene coming home—poor chap!"

Leon, pulling the short grass with strong brown fingers, looked up inquiringly. It seemed it was not going to be difficult to learn what he wished to know.

"Why 'poor chap'?" he asked. "There was some trouble, I know, but was it bad?"

"Very bad. He was Maurice's close friend, and the whole affair was a bad shock."

"I was away in Germany, I believe, and only heard rumours. What was the story? I suppose I wasn't interested in those days."

"No," Hugh said slowly, "I suppose not. I never felt quite happy about the truth of the whole thing. Gene and Jerome were orphans, as you know, and Gene, fourteen years younger than Jerome, was left in his brother's guardianship during the seven years that remained of his minority. Jerome was always the antithesis of Gene—very reserved, rather hard and narrow in his opinions and judgments, meticulous in his life, so strict was his ideal of what breeding and honour demand from a man. It's a fine type and we could do with more like it in these days, but sometimes it is too hard with its fellows. Gene was always a difficult boy, impulsive, extravagant, hot-headed and hot-blooded; and, to me at least, intensely lovable. He had endless fights with Jerome over one thing and another, but when he went into the same regiment as Maurice he seemed to steady down a little. Soldiering was his passion, and it looked as if he was going to do big things. He and Maurice were inseparable, but after a while Gene broke out again and got into several scrapes. Then came my severe illness—it was during that time that the trouble occurred. Gene got into some entanglement with a little girl who danced at the Alhambra, made himself



an absolute fool. Wanted to marry her, had a violent quarrel with Jerome and with Maurice of all people, and then a violent quarrel with her. It seems that he told her about it and she upbraided him for making trouble with his people—I imagine she was clever enough to realise that unless his people accepted her, marriage with him would be impossible. Anyhow, whatever the cause, they quarrelled—and the next morning the girl was found dead in her bed.”

“ Good lord ! ” Leon ejaculated. “ Surely—— ”

“ She drugged, I expect. I always thought so and think so still. But there was no proof, so you can imagine the result. Inquest, arrest of Gene. Press publicity of every kind, the trial, and final verdict—death by misadventure, with a stern censure on Gene by the judge. There was a feeling about, too, that he was only acquitted through actual lack of evidence to condemn him, not through innocence—that was enough to drive anyone distracted. Gene stuck it for two or three days—he was cashiered from his regiment, by the way—then he bolted. Heaven knows what he did or where he went, poor lad—if only he had come to me I might at least have saved him some part of his suffering ; but I was ill, very ill, and he was so desperate, and so young that he trusted no one. I should be interested to see him again.”

“ Poor devil,” Leon said. “ I almost wonder he ever came back at all.”

“ Ten years is a long time—and he is Donnisthorpe’s heir after all.”

“ It has probably been forgotten,” Leon said. “ As you say, it’s a long time.”

His father shrugged expressively.

“ Don’t be misled by that,” he said. “ Scandal is never forgotten. There is always some kind person ready to dig it up again and point the finger of



scorn. The only hope is that Gene has ceased to care."

"It's a damnable thing if he were innocent," Leon retorted. "You don't know what he has been doing all these years, I suppose?"

"Haven't the least idea except that he has been out in the wilds. I shall be curious to see him."

"How will Maurice feel, I wonder? It's odd that you should be marrying his sister."

Almost the same remark as Hilary had made. Hugh recollected it as rather odd, but the set coming to an end and the tempestuous onslaught of Judy prevented his making any comment on the matter, although later it recurred to him rather vividly, for that evening at dinner Cathleen tossed an item of news into a sudden silence.

"Maurice, I saw Bracknell—you know, Donnisthorpe's head keeper—to-day. He has that spaniel pup for you. Also he says that Donnisthorpe's brother has suddenly arrived back from America, Gene Hugon. Why—good heavens, Maurice, what's the matter?"

Her sharp exclamation attracted the attention of the others, and Phyllis and Leon, who had been talking to Hugh a moment before, both turned to see Maurice leaning forward gripping the table-edge, his eyes dilated and blazing, his face a grey-white. He did not seem even to hear his sister's exclamation or to notice the consternation on the faces of the others. Instead he looked at Cathleen.

"Gene Hugon?" he echoed hardly above a whisper. "Did you say Gene was coming back?"

"Yes," Cathleen said wonderingly. "Wasn't he a great friend of yours once upon a time? What on earth is the matter?"

With a great effort Maurice forced himself to some degree of composure.

"I was startled," he said, and his voice was a little breathless like the voice of a man who has been running. "He has been away so long that no one ever expected him back in England. Why has he come?"

His last words held more than a hint of disturbance, and Hilary's words flashed back into Hugh's mind as he looked at his son's grey face. Certainly it appeared as though his brother were right and he himself wrong in thinking that the whole affair had faded from Maurice's mind. It was evident that he was acutely distressed by the news, and Maurice was not one to show his feelings easily. Had he but known it, Leon shared his misgivings, but for a different reason. Hugh wondered, against his will, whether Maurice had had more to do with the foolish escapades that led up to the tragedy than he knew, and Leon saw in Maurice's disturbed state a further complication with regard to his father's marriage, which he already knew his brother was regarding with disfavour.

As for Phyllis, she was perhaps secretly the most disturbed of all, for Gene Hugon had filled her thoughts to the exclusion of all else for thirty-six hours. She had faced the fact of his forgetfulness with quivering nerves and failing courage, but she had faced it nevertheless. He meant all the world to her, and she meant to him just nothing at all. Not even a memory. And he had pretended to recognise her in order to provide himself with an hour or two's amusement! The thought was intolerable, but it was true and Phyllis looked it in the face.

She had not believed it possible that the depth of her own feelings could have left him unmoved, but now she knew it and could only suffer helplessly during the first hours of that dreadful realisation.

At any other time Hugh would have noticed her listless manner and pallor, but just now he was absorbed

in his own affairs, and Leon, her favourite brother, was not particularly observant.

The nights had been the worst, for she slept little and then only to dream feverish, stupid dreams that tormented her already wearied brain.

The increasing tension between Cathleen and Hugh sub-consciously fretted her, but all her conscious thoughts were fighting her own battle, and it was with a sense almost of relief that she looked forward to Hugh's wedding and subsequent month's absence. At least she would be able to relax a little, not fearing any eye but his would notice her state of mind.

The great day came and went. The wedding was in London, the family went up *en masse* to Portland Place; Judy met her fellow attendant and future companion in the person of Angela Walton, a red-curled Botticelli angel-child of ten with the mischief of an imp in her blue eyes. There was a reception after a crowded church. Joyce looked radiant and very pretty, Hugh ridiculously happy. There were the usual speeches and toasts and general confusion, the usual "seeing-off" and gradual dispersal of the guests, a dance at Claridge's afterwards for the most favoured, and now on this scorching morning Phyllis was once more at home and alone, Cathleen having stayed to visit a friend in Onslow Gardens, secretly to her great relief, and to-morrow Hugh and Joyce would return after their three weeks' honeymoon in Norway.

She finished her housekeeping duties, wondered if she should do half an hour's practice and decided not, took a book and a sunshade and wandered out into the garden. Not the sheltered spot where she had sat nearly eight weeks ago on the occasion of Hugh's engagement—it was too hot there—but on a level stretch of lawn in the deep shade of a great red-blossomed chestnut where a faint soft wind blew from

the wide view of fields and woods and far-off line of blue sea.

From where she sat she could see the three children, Ronnie in a white sailor suit, Judy in a very short, very faded, much-washed pink cotton and an old rush hat, and Angela, who had fitted into the family as in the manner born, a slender, exquisite artist-model child with her wide blue eyes, her clean-cut features, her bobbed head of wonderful Titian hair in a mass of shining waves—and her appalling capacity for mischief.

Already she had broken a window, let a colt loose into the gardens where he had rolled in a bed of prize carnations, spilt ink all over her bedroom carpet, and lost the key of the schoolroom piano down the bathroom waste-pipe. But she was lovable to a degree, Ronnie adored her, and Judy, despite her three years' seniority, flung herself into any plan with the utmost avidity.

Judy was supposed to be mowing the small lawn down by the brook—a brook that was now reduced to a mere thread of water barely a foot across and only an inch or two deep—and Phyllis leaned back against her green cushion and closed her eyes. For the moment her tired nerves relaxed, the vision of Gene was less insistent, she felt almost able to sleep, and was just dozing off and in that ecstatic state on slumber's veritable border-land when a yell from Ronnie and a shriek of her name from Judy jerked her back to vivid consciousness. Blinking and startled she sprang up, saw Judy wave to her, and ran across the lawn to the far side of the garden where the children were. There, hatless, in the full blaze of the sun sat Angela, her face rather white but a cheerful grin as ever about her lips, while Judy knelt in the long grass beside her holding up one slim white leg—Angela

never tanned—from which the blood was pouring with an alarming violence.

Even as Phyllis arrived Ronnie burst out crying in terror, while Judy gave a hasty explanation.

"She's cut herself with the scythe. . . . I can't stop the bleeding."

"It doesn't hurt much," the culprit added airily. "It's only my head—feels—rather funny——"

The grin remained, but the voice tailed off, and with a swift movement Phyllis snatched at Judy.

"The cord of your frock. That's right—give it to me—and your hat. Run in and bring someone to help me carry her indoors. Stop yelling, Ronnie, and tell them to telephone for Dr. Ryle. Quick now!"

Judy waited to shade Angela's head with her big rush hat, then was off like an arrow to the house, and Ronnie following her burst in upon Leon writing letters in the library, sobbing and panting.

"She's cut her leg—nearly off—the doctor—Phyllis——"

He was quite unintelligible, and Leon leaped up from the table and shook him.

"Who—what? Shut up and tell me!" he commanded none too gently. "Who's cut—where?"

"Angela. In the garden. Phyllis wanted you——"

Leon waited for no more, but went off at a run, and a few minutes later a very white, limp little figure was lying on the sofa in the hall—with an impromptu tourniquet above the deep cut, an ice-cold handkerchief dripping about her head, and Phyllis washing the cut with peroxide and water till the doctor should arrive.

So much for her peaceful morning, and it was with the greatest relief an hour or so later—the doctor come and gone—that she entered Angela's bedroom to find



their old Nannie with her and the culprit herself, white, but secretly delighted at her importance, lying back on a heap of pillows.

In the absence of both mother and newly acquired stepfather, Leon took upon himself to conduct the inquiry.

"You cut yourself with the scythe, I understand," he began. "How was it you had the scythe at all?"

"We were cutting the grass," Angela began, eagerly anxious to talk after the enforced silence. "It was quite long by the brook and we thought it would be such a nice surprise for Peters."

Peters was the head gardener.

"I see. And you were using the mowing machine."

"Yes. I thought of the scythe and sent Ronnie to get it. The old machine was so slow."

"Quite so. Did anyone tell you you were not supposed to touch a scythe?"

"There wasn't anyone in the shed to tell me anything. I just took it. Judy said I oughtn't, but no one had told me, and I wouldn't let her or Ronnie touch it."

"You knew, then, it was against orders?"

"Well"—Angela put her head on one side and looked at her stern inquisitor with the sweetest of smiles—"I may have *guessed* so, but I thought I wouldn't ask. It seemed a pity. The scythe was so sharp and cut so well!"

Leon bit his lip.

"Do you think that was quite playing the game?" he said, abandoning the pose of judge.

Angela considered.

"I suppose not. But anyway I've been punished, haven't I? Nobody else got it."

"That's so. But supposing you had hurt yourself



much worse? Would you have been so ready to forget about being naughty?"

Again that seraphic smile.

"Mother always says it is a pity to look on the black side of things," she said. "And I didn't hurt myself worse, did I? But I won't touch the scythe again in case Judy or Ronnie get hurt. Please let me give you a kiss, Leon, and then I'm going to have my tea. Chicken sandwiches! Mrs. Taylor's sent them up on purpose!"

Leon, going slowly down the sunlit passage that led from the children's quarters, confessed himself beaten, and laughed till he reached the garden and Phyllis, who was highly amused at the result of his attempt at discipline.

Phyllis played two sets of tennis with religious attention to necessary exercise, changed into a cool frock of daffodil-yellow crêpe de Chine, and was just wondering when tea would make its appearance when her aunt Norah Chalmington appeared round the corner of the house.

"I'm not going to stay even for a cup of tea, my dear," she explained, "but I want to know if you and Leon will come over to dinner to-night—we've two or three people only and we'll dance afterwards. I'm on my way to call at Cross Commons—Mrs. Barclay's had a baby. You will? Seven-thirty, then. Good. I'm so glad. By the way, Hilary told me to tell Maurice that Gene Hugon is at the Castle. Will you tell him? Good-bye, my dear," and she was gone.

Maurice, as usual in the afternoons, was reading in a shady place at a little distance from the house, his two sticks on the grass beside the wide, scarlet-striped canvas hammock that was slung between two lime-trees that scented all the air around, and as she approached she thought how pale and hollow-eyed he looked.

"Shall I tell Louise to bring tea over here?" she said, sitting down on the warm short turf. "You look dreadfully tired, Maurice. Is the pain worrying you?"

"A little," he said, frowning—"nothing much. I walked too far yesterday. Yes, I should like tea over here, then I needn't get up. By the way, I heard a car—whose was it?"

Phyllis told him and delivered her message, only to see his jaw set, and his mouth straighten into a hard line.

"You were very close friends once, weren't you?" she added. "Maurice—I met Gene Hugon when I was in America six years ago."

"What?"

He jerked out the word, starting up in a manner that sent a stab of pain through spine and hip and dropped him back on the cushions, and with quick concern Phyllis bent over him.

"My dear, be careful! Yes. On the train. We didn't talk much. I didn't know who he was till I met him in London when we first went up to meet Joyce."

Maurice, breathing a little unevenly, reached out a hand and grasped her wrist.

"I don't want to see him," he said. "If he calls don't let him know I'm at home. I can't see him. Promise me, Phyllis! Promise me!"

Maurice was always so controlled, so very much master of himself, that Phyllis was dismayed at such signs of agitation and hastened to give him the required promise, adding:

"He's not likely to come. I don't know him well enough, and why should he wish to meet people who knew of his disgrace? Don't worry, Maurice dear."

He made no reply, but lay back again on his cushions staring in front of him beneath frowning brows, and Phyllis was glad of a distraction which occurred in the person of Louise, the parlour maid, who came across the lawn with the tea-table and a message.

"It's Mr. Sims, miss; he's come up to see the master about the land that Mr. Hilary was inquiring about a week or two ago. When he heard the master was away he said he'd like to see you."

"Very well, I'll come. Don't make the tea for a moment or two. Where is he?"

"In the gun-room, Miss Phyllis."

"Very well," and relieved to turn her thoughts to something else Phyllis went away across the wide, sunlit lawn to the house, entered by a side door behind the row of red chestnut-trees, and made her way to the gun-room. It was a small place opening on one side into a side passage at the eastern end of the house, on the other into the square yard close to the stables, and was also used by Hugh as a place to interview any of the outdoor staff or his farm bailiff.

In the room, gazing at the old sporting prints on one side of the room, Phyllis found the visitor, a hard-faced yeoman farmer who held a farm about two miles away, known as Mannard's farm. He responded to her greeting with a certain curt civility, and plunged at once into the reason of his call.

"I hoped to see your father, Miss Chalmington, but as he ain't here I'd better tell you. You've heard that Mr. Hugh has sold the land coming up by the side o' my farm. The Sixty-acre they call it—reaching right up to Gallows Corner."

"Yes," Phyllis said. "Sit down, Mr. Sims. Well, what of it?"

"What of it? It's a pretty deal, Miss Chalmington,

I can tell you that. The man that's bought it is the new owner of Medenham Hall—he's a Jew—millionaire or something like that—and he's put up a notice closing the bridle path 'cross the Sixty-acre to my farm gates. Now, that can't be done, and Mr. Hugh oughtn't to a' sold it to a man like that. What does he know about land? Nothin'! What's he want to buy a country place for? Nothin'! It ain't right, and I'm not the man to put up with it."

He broke off in rising heat.

Phyllis, knowing something of her man, seized on the first pause.

"No one is asking you to put up with it, Mr. Sims. When my father returns from his honeymoon he shall be told of the matter at once. But"—a sudden vague memory came to her—"are you sure it is a legal right of way?"

John Sims's face took on a look of obstinacy. "Man and boy I've used that path for years," he began. "I'm not going to see it closed by any Jew millionaire what thinks he can own the land same as them that are born and brought up on it. It ain't fair dealin'!"

Phyllis rose from her chair.

"I quite understand, Mr. Sims. My father will be back next week and he shall be informed at once. I suppose Sir Abel has really closed it?"

"Put up a fence right across the gap into Thors Meadow and a notice 'Trespassers will be prosecuted.' He thinks he can take the law in his own hands, but he'll find he can't. Money can't do everything, though there's those that think it can."

There was a truculence in his manner and tone that betokened trouble, and Phyllis, though ready to sympathise with the natural annoyance that he felt, was repulsed by his attitude. He was a good tenant she

knew, but an awkward one and none too popular either with his fellow-tenants or with Hugh, and if Sir Abel Abrahams had really exercised what she feared was a legal right she realised that bad blood was likely to be the result. And at all events it was too vexatious that Hugh should be faced with annoyance directly he returned from his honeymoon.

Tea was waiting when she returned to Maurice, who was not reading, but gazing across into the blue distance with eyes that frowned.

"Nothing to eat," he said, when she would have persuaded him—"no, thanks. How did Aunt Norah know that—that Hugon had returned to England?"

"I don't know," Phyllis answered, curiously reluctant to speak of Gene; "I suppose she must have met Lord Donnisthorpe."

"Yes. Hullo, Leon, heard you're going out to-night?"

"Where?" Leon inquired. "Any tea left, Phyllis?" and when he was informed said something about "black tie or tails?" and inquired as to the nature of Sims's visit.

"He seems to regard the matter as partly Hugh's fault," Phyllis added, when she had given her explanation. "And you know how socialistic he is. He'll see in this a fresh attack by the capitalist on the working man."

"Yes. Damned nuisance for the governor. What with taxes and Bolsheviks I'm glad there's no chance of my ever being a landowner!"

"We haven't a monopoly of either," Maurice remarked. "The States have their share. When are you going back? You never see any good in your own country."

Leon, surprised at the bitterness of the tone, stared at his brother, but Maurice was not looking at him;

and meeting Phyllis's eyes, he merely shrugged and got up from his seat.

" Might as well have a swim before dinner," he said, and with no further glance or word towards his brother strolled off across the grass.



GENE HUGON, sitting on the edge of the writing-table at the foot of the big four-poster, watched his brother's man Carter laying out his evening clothes with eyes that saw yet did not consider the actions. The room facing west was full of evening sunshine, the big tulip-tree just outside one of the windows casting dancing shadows on the carpet when the breeze rippled its leaves and gently stirred the curtains.

From a door that stood open came the sound of running water betokening the filling of a bath, and even as Gene watched, Carter departed and returned soft-footed and wooden of face—the perfect valet.

"Your bath is ready, sir," he announced, and Gene got up, tossed his cigarette into the grate, uttered a curt "That's all," and watched the man leave the room.

He undressed leisurely, took his bath, and was halfway through his toilet when there was a knock at the door and Carter reappeared.

"His lordship told me to tell you, sir, that he has accepted an invitation for you both to dine at Wrexford Hall. Will you be ready at twenty minutes to eight."

Gene, standing in shirt, trousers, and collar, tie in hand, swung round.

"He expects me to go with him?"

"Yes, sir. That is what he said."

"Tell him I don't wish to go out anywhere."

Carter looked entirely noncommittal.

"Pardon me, sir, but his lordship said as he particularly wished it."

For a moment Gene looked ugly. He had lived his own life in his own way too long to brook interference, but the cool brain that had saved him over and over again from the results of his violent temper checked hasty speech.

"Tell his lordship I'll be ready," he said curtly, and Carter departed, leaving Gene to finish dressing in no very sweet temper. He had only arrived at Donnisthorpe an hour ago after spending several weeks in London, and already he longed to get away. He had returned to England because his godmother, dying, had left him a considerable fortune, and his brother's peremptory letter accompanying one from the late Mrs. Crot's solicitors had demanded his presence, and the strange meeting with Phyllis Chalmington had sufficiently caught his attention to keep him from at once returning to America.

Donnisthorpe had requested him to come to the Castle, and rather against his own inclination he had assented, but already he was wishing he had refused.

For ten years he had been an outcast living by his wits, drifting from one dangerous mode of life to another, breaking the laws of God and man as he chose. His capture six years before by the Sheriff of the county and his subsequent robbery at the Carden ranch a week or two later had sent him over the Mexican border and finally to a life of wandering that ended in Buenos Aires, and the receipt of the letters that had found him after several months' delay. He had grown a moustache, dropped his name of Ramsden, and returned quite boldly to New York anxious to find whether he was still wanted by the authorities and only able to find out several weeks afterwards through tortuous methods of his own that Carden of Carden's Ranch

had been killed in the war and that apparently the other man had lodged no complaint against him. So his path was clear, and he took his passage in the *Aquitania*, shaved, bought the necessary clothes and outfit, and sailed for England with curiously conflicting emotions.

The first night he had spent at the theatre with the resulting meeting of Phyllis Chalmington—and ever since their morning together in Hyde Park he had been curiously restless and perplexed. It was sufficiently disturbing that almost the first person to whom he had spoken after landing should bring him back once more into the very heart of the surroundings amongst which he had grown up, but the chief cause of his worry was an old memory that recurred at times, and recurring always brought a restless misery in its wake, and that was the memory of his capture in the New Mexican desert and the resulting five hours on the trans-continental train.

It came to him sometimes in the timeless borderland between sleep and wakefulness, sometimes in his dreams, sometimes in his daylight conscious hours—the recollection of a woman's voice, of hands about his aching battered head deftly tending its wounds, of a face only dimly seen, more dimly remembered, yet haunting him with relentless continuance. If only he could definitely capture the picture, could visualise the features so vaguely seen—the vision that evaded him despite his utmost efforts . . . if only he could force his brain to bring back every detail of that journey . . . and try as he would he could not.

Watching Phyllis that morning in Hyde Park it had crossed his mind that she might be the girl who had been so divinely pitiful, but he thrust the suggestion impatiently aside. It was not likely that she would have claimed his acquaintance had she and that girl

been one and the same—infinately unlikely, considering whom she revealed herself to be. Yet her personality began to haunt him even as his vague memory of that other woman did ; he found himself recalling the tones of her voice, the look in her eyes, the line of her throat and chin, and the golden fairness of her hair. He remembered the colour of her dress and the drooping brim of her white hat, that shadowed her eyes, and the realisation of these memories troubled him not a little. His life had been spoiled enough, he did not want it complicated by passion for a woman—love he did not even contemplate. Passion weakened a man, left him at the mercy not only of the woman who inspired it, but at the mercy of circumstance. It clouded his vision, obscured his judgment, tormented mind and body alike, and he wanted none of it. The vague remembrance of that hour in the swaying, rattling train warned him, and with that warning came the personality of Phyllis Chalmington. Impatient and disturbed in spite of himself, he admitted that he had lingered in town upon the chance of meeting her again, and had come to the Castle secretly angry because that meeting had never taken place.

Then, too, his return to the home of his boyhood was in itself sufficiently trying, bringing back with tragic clearness his lonely childhood, his rebellious youth, his manhood's disgrace. He could feel it all again as he stood staring out of the window at the familiar stretch of garden park and distant sea—the pain, the helplessness, the cruelty, the overwhelming shame, and lastly the desperation that drove him to flight.

He jerked his thoughts back to the present, realising how overwhelmingly bitter were the thoughts of the past, lit a cigarette, and went out of the room, down-stairs to the library, where he knew Donnisthorpe would expect him to wait.

Nothing was changed. The great hall with its vaulted stone ceiling and tapestry-hung walls, the long shafts of evening sunshine through the great oriel window, crimson, purple, and amber as it struck through the rich colours of the ancient glass, the Italian furniture of the early sixteenth century, the faded silken splendours of Persian rugs hardly less old—the suits of armour that as a child had stirred his imagination to such romantic flights, the sense of history living and vivid—all was there, serene, dignified, speaking of a great name and a great past. Only he was different, and it had remained for him only to bring disgrace upon an honourable house.

He had scorned it often enough, this sense of obligation to an inheritance, yet now, in the quick midst of this ancient home of his where for four centuries his family had lived and died, its influence came back in strength. Out there in the desert or the lonely stretches of the great West it was easy to throw off the trammels and traditions of aristocracy; back here in their stronghold it was more difficult, less fine, even a little contemptible. An ancient name, a great inheritance, despite Socialistic doctrine or modern revolutionary teaching, was a thing to be proud of and therefore a thing that carried its own weight of duty. A man born to great privilege was also born to great responsibilities, ceaseless work for those less fortunate, the obligation of honour . . . of wisdom . . . it was almost food for amusement these thoughts so long foreign . . . so absurd when taken in conjunction with the difference between theory and fulfilment . . . so damnably young and clean and fine! . . . Gene's mouth twisted, his eyes closed because the sting of tears threatened sight, his hands clenched and unclenched . . . ten years . . . twenty . . . it was all the same . . . he laughed and he wanted to weep at



that child who had dreamed such brave dreams and lived to see what he had made of them.

A footman, tall and silent, powdered of hair and imposing of calf, came across the hall, outwardly the picture of decorum, internally agog with curiosity over this stranger's advent about whose wild doings gossip was rife. He opened the great iron-studded doors, letting a flood of deep amber sunshine into the shadowy hall, and downstairs came Lord Donnisthorpe, a man of great height and middle age, fair hair going grey, fair clipped moustache, with an air of rather bitter precision about him, showing a family likeness about the cut of nose and chin, but in all essentials utterly unlike his brother. A man whose pride of race was a religion, whose personal honour was his God—upright, narrow, conscientious, unselfish in that he was unsparingly harsh towards himself—and utterly devoid of sympathy or the impulsive kindness that so often makes a sinner lovable.

At his appearance Gene spoke, his tone none too agreeable.

"Who lives at Wrexford and why do you want me to go?"

Donnisthorpe's cold blue eyes swept his brother from head to foot.

"Hilary Chalmington," he replied. "He is Hugh Chalmington's brother and particularly requested your presence. If you're ready we'll start at once. It is a ten-mile drive and I dislike being late for dinner."

Gene got into the car, and, as it swung down the long avenue of Lebanon cedars famous throughout England, spoke curtly because of that unaccustomed choking wretchedness that worked at his throat.

"I don't wish to meet people down here. Please don't accept any further invitations for me."



"I can quite appreciate your feelings," Donnisthorpe said dryly. "But so long as you are here I must ask you to behave as any other guest of mine would. That is all."

Gene's muscles stiffened; hard as he was, he knew he could never be as hard as his brother, never have deliberately forced remembrance home. However, if such were Donnisthorpe's intentions and attitude, the more fool he, Gene, to resent it. There was only one thing to do, and that was to leave the place and thus remove the possibility.

The sun sank below far-off wooded hills, just as the car, climbing the long, steep, chalky hill above the sea, turned in at the Wrexford gates and he saw a solid white Georgian house, backed by trees and facing over wide, sloping lawns to the cliffs they had left.

He had not seen the house since his childhood and he had never entered it, but he was not interested, and the beauty of the evening made him desire to get away by himself out-of-doors.

They were shown into a square, cream-panelled room leading on to a broad terrace, and Gene saw several people in the room and as he was welcomed by his hostess felt the little stir of interest his name caused.

Norah Chalmington, however, was resolutely determined to ignore the past, and having never seen him before and not being in the least interested in his possible villainy of ten years before, but only as to his behaviour in the present, showed a certain delicate *empressement* in her welcome, that was not lost upon Gene.

"I'm so glad you came," she said, her charming face expressing very real pleasure. "We're going to dance afterwards even though we're such a tiny party. Colonel Daltry, Mrs. Daltry—General Napier—my daughter Pamela—Captain Fane Wentworth, Lady Dorothy Wentworth, Miss Chalmington."

The girl standing in the embrasure of one of the windows talking to Captain Wentworth turned round, controlling a slight start, gave him a cool hand and met his eyes steadily.

"How do you do? My aunt did not tell me you were coming."

She was far too trained in social manner to show the emotion that disturbed her at sight of him, but he was less successful and a dull colour showed under his tanned skin.

"I did not know myself until the last moment," he said, whereat she nodded.

"You are staying with Lord Donnisthorpe, of course," she said. "The Castle is about ten miles from us."

"I came down from town to-day," he said. "And I'm going back almost at once."

Phyllis, playing idly with the fringed ends of her pale-green sash, tied two strands of silk into a vicious little knot.

"Isn't that a pity when you've only just come back after so long?" she asked. "You know, the advent of a stranger is a wonderful adventure, for we're only a few this side of the county and we don't like to meet someone once and lose him again."

"Twice," Gene said, saw her colour change ever so faintly, and cursed himself for speaking, for she dropped the fringe of her sash and looked up at him with eyes no longer velvet-soft.

"I'm sorry you said that," she said quietly; "it's disappointed me. I thought—quite foolishly—that you would have understood. Yes—twice. I acted on impulse, and you very naturally treated my foolishness in the way it deserved. So that is ended."

He shifted his position a little so that he was more back to the room and could talk more privately.

"I don't want it ended," he began, "and I had no

intention of vexing you—can't I talk to you somewhere to-night ? ”

His voice, rough and impatient, sent a little tremor through her nerves, and she was thankful to see Leon at her elbow and hear her aunt's voice close by—“ Mr. Hugon, will you take in my niece ? ”—so that she was only able to say “ Perhaps—I don't know ”—before there was a general move to the dining-room.

They went in informally, Pamela behind her with Fane Wentworth, Leon just in front, only Lord Donnisthorpe giving an arm to his hostess and Hilary to Mrs. Daltry, rather to Phyllis's relief, for her nerves were playing enough tricks on her to-night without superimposing upon them the ordeal of physical touch.

Their places at table faced across the room to the open windows and garden beyond, and Phyllis, feeling like a tongue-tied schoolgirl, shook out her napkin and was wondering what to say, when Gene spoke again, his tone less curt but with a tinge in it of the old Western drawl :

“ What part of America were you in when you were over ? Was it long ago ? ”

“ Four years. I went out to the West . . . it was in the West that I met you first.”

She answered deliberately, trying to hurt him because of his reference to her own folly at the theatre ; but her words had a very different effect, for at that instant Leon, who was sitting nearly opposite, was for the moment deserted by his partner, who was asking some question of Colonel Daltry, and catching the words looked across just as Gene answered :

“ The West ? Well, it's a pretty big place, isn't it ? Won't you be more definite and tell—— ”

Across the table Leon stared, spoke sharply, interrupting him.

"I think my aunt forgot to introduce us," he said. "My name is Leon Chalmington. I don't think you heard it—before."

Gene did not speak for a moment, but holding Leon's glance he stiffened ever so slightly, and his right hand made a sudden movement, instantly checked yet eloquent enough to anyone who knew, and Leon, knowing, smiled very slightly and shrugged his shoulders.

"I seem to be mistaken," he said lightly. "You are extraordinarily like someone I once stayed with—as a fellow-guest. Did you say you weren't going to Ascot, Dorothy?"

He was talking to his pretty partner before Gene could speak, but Phyllis watching the little scene—its duration barely two minutes—knew how significant it had been, realised, with a sudden deadly fear, that Leon knew something of Gene's career hidden from her, perhaps even worse than she herself knew, and felt all her annoyance and resentment drop from her like a cloak. Looking at Gene she saw him still watching Leon, his face expressionless, his mouth a thin line, his whole body rigid.

"Mr. Hugon," she said in a low voice, "what is it? When did you meet my brother?"

She had to repeat her question, and then slowly he turned his head and looked at her; and somehow her voice and the anxiety in her eyes loosed the tension of his nerves. He had carried his life in his hand too long to be the victim of the unforeseen, and even as he looked at her the fierce stillness left him.

"I sure am like some other fellow," he drawled. "Even your brother thought he knew me."

What prompted her Phyllis did not know, but the words were past her lips almost before she knew.

"Are you sure he did not?"

Just for a second he did not reply, then without waiting for his answer she spoke again :

" You said you wanted to talk to me. I think it would be a good thing, there are things to be explained. We will go out in the garden while they are dancing because I too have something to say. It's rather serious—rather urgent—so talk about something else now—anything—or Leon will notice."

But as it happened Leon's partner, Lady Dorothy Wentworth, the extremely modern daughter of an extremely modern mother, a dark-haired, dark-eyed young girl of nineteen, thin, almost haggard, and already much talked of, had noticed the moment's tense situation and promptly seized upon it.

" You've been away from England for years, haven't you ? " she began, leaning across the table and talking rather loudly. " Wild and woolly West, wasn't it—all among the movie-people, I suppose ? And cow-boys ? "

" Sure," was Gene's laconic answer.

" How funny you are—' sure ' ! That sounds like the movies themselves ! What are real cowboys like ? Thrilling ? "

" They don't shave much," Gene replied slowly, " or wash a great deal—they've rough work to do and they're rough men. That's all."

" And they always are supposed to be handsome, aren't they ? " adding : " Have you read *The Green Bough* ? " referring to a novel of so-called Western life that had made something of a success, and in the same breath, without waiting for an answer to either question, added with a laugh : " But of course you haven't. You've been doing far more amusing things than reading novels. Do they read novels where you come from ? "

It came about that *The Green Bough*, a novel pur-

porting to be of life in Arizona, had been one of the few novels he had read of late years, as it was in the library of the *Aquitania*, and Lady Dorothy's tone, even more than her remark, annoyed him.

"I believe such a thing has been done," he said. "But *The Green Bough* is just junk to my mind. There's not a line of sense in it to anyone who knows the country."

"Oh? Really? How amusing!" Lady Dorothy's voice was exaggeratedly clear. "How *frightfully* amusing! I suppose you don't happen to know the author?"

"I do not," Gene said shortly.

"Well, I do. He's a great friend of mine—and he happens to have written that book while he was there. Rather quaint he should know nothing about it."

"Some men can live in a place all their lives and never know one thing about it."

"Yes. And some can go there and come away thinking they know more about it than anyone else. Why don't *you* write a book about Arizona?"

Gene's look was as insolent as hers, as their eyes met.

"Why should I?" he asked.

Somehow feeling that he was not properly appreciating her snubbing, Lady Dorothy took a further step.

"I really don't know. It would be much easier to say why you should not. The answer would be obvious, wouldn't it? Perhaps you'll say Shakespeare didn't know Venice—or Rome."

"Well"—Gene's tone dropped more deliberately into the Western drawl—"that's sure bright of you. Did he?"

Greatly to her annoyance Lady Dorothy flushed. She was used to a great deal of adulation, and this man



actually seemed—incredible as it was—to have turned the tables and be snubbing her. It was time he was taught a lesson.

“That’s American slang, isn’t it? How amusing it sounds! You’ll find us very dull over here. We don’t do anything exciting like turning machine-guns on strikers or smuggling whisky in one’s boots—or raiding trains. Have you ever raided a train?”

In spite of herself Phyllis stole a glance at him, and under his deep tan she saw his face go a curious ashen white. Just for an instant he did not speak, then said quite coolly: “What for? Whisky? That’s left to the Government,” and deliberately turned his shoulder on her and spoke to Phyllis.

“I didn’t realise how few English people travel,” he said. “But I suppose if they did it wouldn’t make any difference to them.”

Lady Dorothy heard this impertinence, as he had meant she should, but it was Leon who came to the rescue, preventing her replying to it, suddenly leaning forward a little to address Gene the more pointedly.

“I was in Arizona several years ago. It’s a wonderful country.” That curious ashen pallor was still beneath the bronze of Gene’s skin and it did not escape Leon’s quick eye, but he himself detested Dorothy Wentworth, and considered she had baited Gene for no reason. But Gene was not to be aided out of any trouble he got into, and his reply was curt to the point of rudeness.

“It’s as good as any other.”

And that was all; but the two men faced one another across the table and each knew himself to be recognised by the other—and each recognised equally a silent declaration of war.

The rest of that dinner was to two at least of the guests a singularly uncomfortable meal, and Phyllis was devoutly thankful when she caught Norah's eye and rose, though by no means easy in her mind as to how Leon and Gene would behave. She need not have feared, for Leon, dismayed at the identity of Donnisthorpe's brother and Maurice's erstwhile friend, had no wish to force a situation that must inevitably lead to disaster, and during the few minutes occupied himself in a discussion with Wentworth as to the future of civilian flying, which fruitful subject lasted till they left the dining-room.

Phyllis, talking rather absently to Mrs. Napier, heard her aunt say :

" Pam dear, put on a foxtrot first," and a moment later heard the strains of a gramophone just as the men entered.

Gene came in at last with his host, looked swiftly round the room, and came straight over to her.

" Will you dance this with me ? " he said ; and thankful for anything that postponed the conversation she was already dreading, Phyllis assented, and for the next few minutes forgot perplexities, love, and sorrow alike in the rare joy of perfect dancing. She herself danced well, but Gene danced exquisitely, his lithe, tall figure so perfectly poised, elastic yet strong as steel, his rhythm, and pleasure in the exercise, all making him the most wonderful partner she had ever had.

It came to an end all too soon, but Gene merely stood still, holding her till Pamela had started another record, this time a waltz ; and giving herself up to the ecstasy of perfectly attuned movement, Phyllis forgot all else. Gene, like most really superb dancers, danced for sheer love of it, caring nothing for the intimacy of contact or the possible pleasurable emotion

such contact aroused, and not till the waltz had ended and another had followed it did thought and memory return to torment him. Then, suddenly the youth and joy went out of his face, and Phyllis, seeing the old look of bitterness returning, took her courage in both hands.

"Let us go out into the garden now," she suggested.

"The moon is up and there's no dew."

He assented at once, and going out through a French window they came at once into another world; a world of silver radiance and deep velvet-soft shadow; of sweet night-scented plants and infinite peace; a world where only a far-off nightingale pouring out a flood of rippling song broke the silence.

They walked without speaking and as if by common consent to the edge of the wide lawn before the house, and there, where a little flagged stone path and two white wood garden chairs invited rest, they sat down near a great bush of flowering syringa.

"Please smoke," Phyllis said, abruptly breaking the silence by a commonplace. "No, I won't just now. What a wonderful night!"

Gene made no comment; the evening's happenings, the meeting again with Phyllis, and above all the mutual recognition of Leon and himself had upset all his plans. He had been attracted by Phyllis that day in the park—and since he had avoided women for years that alone was rather disturbing; but now meeting her again in a conventional setting, he could not ignore her presence or put her out of his thoughts. That Leon Chalmington should be her brother, and the man who had rescued him and whom in turn he had robbed and threatened, was no very pleasant knowledge, and smoking furiously he turned to look at Phyllis, hardly realising what he was doing.

She was leaning back a little, her hands loosely

clasped in her lap, the silver embroideries of her white, filmy frock catching the moonlight till they looked like tiny points of fire, her head a little bent, her eyes remote, showing her thoughts were far away ; and as Gene became conscious that he was watching her, he became conscious of something else, of a certain vital thing coming to life in his heart, of a stirring of deep and tender emotions, and suddenly, as the storm shakes a tree, passion awoke and shook him. This girl—or was she a woman?—sitting there so quietly, so unconscious of the tumult her very stillness aroused. this girl who might so easily have been the dream-woman of that far-off hour when love had first wakened in his heart . . . he was mad . . . crazy . . . why could he not be faithful now to that dream-woman as he had been faithful for all those long years . . . he . . . robber . . . slayer of men . . . Black Ramsden . . . and Leon Chalmington's sister . . . why did the dim dream of that other woman . . . the remorse and wretchedness that had come to him only a few hours before as he stood alone in the home of his fathers, and passion for this woman so near him and yet so infinitely far away, mingle in one great overwhelming tide of emotion? He threw away his cigarette and put his hands to his throat, and at the movement Phyllis looked up, looked and saw in his face the wild tumult of his soul. And seeing, her own calmness fled and she began to tremble.

"I . . . I think . . . we ought. . . ." She broke off the disjointed words because some inner sense told her it was useless, and the next moment she was on her feet and Gene's hands were crushing hers and Gene's face bent down was but an inch or two from her own. His hands gripping hers were hot as though with fever, she could feel him shaking, and the sight and touch made her senses reel, her breath come chokingly.

She tried to speak, tried to control her quivering nerves, then suddenly all the hesitation and fear died, her tense muscles relaxed as she gave herself into his arms, and Gene's mouth was pressed on her mouth, his fevered lips crushing her lips till she could neither feel nor breathe nor see.

"I LOVE you . . . I love you . . . how sweet your hair smells . . . dearest . . . your hair . . . let me feel it on my face. . . ."

Broken words of tenderness and passion, kisses that burned, arms that crushed and clung . . . and only the cold radiance of the moon looking down on the man and woman in the throes of that greatest Force in all the world . . . the Force that masquerades under many names but acknowledges only one . . . Love. . . .

At last, faint with emotion, dazed with happiness, Phyllis spoke :

"I love you. . . . I have loved you for years. Do you think I should have spoken to you that evening at the theatre if I had not? Gene . . . Gene . . . hold me close to you !"

She knew now why women gave everything and recked nothing of what came after . . . her throat ached, her eyes were wet, the blood in her veins burned like fire. She was of Helen's brood, and like Helen her love was too great for dissimulation, unashamed in its glad pride of surrender, primitive, overwhelming—and Gene crushed her in his arms and forgot everything but desire for this woman who gave him kiss for kiss in supreme answering ecstasy.

Presently through the storm that beat upon them came the sound of voices, footsteps, a note of gay laughter in a woman's voice, and Phyllis gave a little sound, half-word, half-sob, and slipping from his



loosened arms fled down the path towards the trees and shrubs unable to endure any company but her own till she had regained something of her self-control.

As for Gene he was too late, dazed and shaken, and Norah Chalmington's voice said gaily :

"All alone out here in the moonlight? How ungallant to enjoy this heavenly night alone!"

She was at his side, and just behind her Donnisthorpe stood watching, a little smile on his lips, and before his brother could reply said gently :

"I don't think he has been alone long, dear Mrs. Chalmington," whereupon senseless rage took Gene, and he felt an insane desire to strike Donnisthorpe's smiling mouth. Instead she laughed again and laid her hand lightly on his arm.

"But how wise of him! And now I have found one of the truants, he shall take me to look for the other and Pamela shall behave very nicely to you. . . . Pam dear, take Lord Donnisthorpe to dance. He declares he has forgotten how."

Pamela, a few yards away talking to two of her partners, came across to them and took Donnisthorpe off as though she were possessed of magic, and Norah, gently impelling Gene onward, moved along the path toward the cliff's edge where the sea lay like murmuring silver beneath the moon.

Gene did not speak and neither did Norah, for she had realised in that first moment of meeting that something had happened to this guest of hers. She knew men, and the fierceness in Gene's eyes, the strained keenness of his face, told her that he was in the grip of powerful emotion even without the throbbing tremor that ran through his whole body and shook even the iron-hard muscle of his arms where her hand rested.

Where the path ended in a little hollowed curve

of old stone seat and wide balustrade she stopped and sat down, looked out over the shimmering murmuring water, and without looking at Gene began to talk, almost idly, like a woman who thinks aloud.

"What a waste of time to spend our lives in houses with the glare of electric lights when this waits just outside our door! I have never been in the desert, but I think the desert must be like this—infinite peace—infinite space. It would heal wounds and absolve sins . . . it would cleanse lives and give the courage to begin again. If ever Life strikes too hardly to be borne I shall go to the desert."

Gene's voice, exhausted and a little unsteady, answered her:

"Why do you say that? I have known the desert drive men mad."

"Then those men had mistaken its message. Great space, great solitude, *must* heal—must give a man time to gather his courage once again."

"It gives men time to face themselves . . . time to think . . . that is what kills. . . ."

"There comes a time when a man must face himself or he cannot live as a man should!" she flashed. "We all of us dread our true selves, man and woman alike, if we are honest."

"And if that knowledge condemns utterly? What then?"

She turned her eyes from the sea and, for the first time since that first glance, looked fully at him.

"Then the desert has done its work well. The man knows his own soul with its sins and its degradation and its splendid possibilities. It is time for him to turn his back on the past and look to the heights because he once knew the depths."

He gave her no answer, but stood looking moodily out to sea, the first tumult of desire and the still

greater danger of all-enveloping tenderness was for the moment a thing of the past, and as a result an immense depression—the natural reaction, had he but understood it—was settling upon mind and spirit. Presently he lit a cigarette, but still did not talk, and Norah began to be uneasy respecting her duties as hostess ; yet she was quite assured that Gene was facing some crisis, and a subtle instinct told her it was as well that she stayed. Watching him when he was not aware of it, she saw his eyes gleaming beneath frowning brows, saw the hands that rested on the broad balustrade clenching nervously, saw too a certain tense rigidity in his body that was eloquent of strain. Yet presently his disturbing thoughts seemed to pass, his forehead smoothed, and taut muscles relaxed, and, letting his breath go in a long sigh, he turned to her.

"Would you think it very rude if I left ? " he said. " I don't want to meet my brother again to-night—and I can't dance any more."

The request was proffered so bluntly that Norah could hardly refuse it and characteristically made no protest. She never fussed when a man desired to pursue some apparently odd course of action, never worried for explanations, and in consequence men trusted her and treated her as they would one of their own sex.

"How will you get back ? " she asked. "Would you like me to send the car ? Your brother will want his for his own return."

"I'll walk," Gene said shortly, whereupon one little exclamation of surprise escaped her.

"Not in light dancing shoes ! Your feet will be terribly blistered."

"They won't hurt," he answered roughly. "These roads are easy enough."

"Ten miles ! Of course they will ! My little two-

seater is the thing. She shall be at the gate in ten minutes and you can drive yourself and bring her back to-morrow. To please me. If you want exercise take it after you get home and can change your shoes ! See how terribly practical I am ! ”

There was laughter in her voice as she purposely turned the conversation, if such it could be called, to a lighter tone, and Gene, forced by her kindly thought to some acknowledgment, said a little more pleasantly that he would accept her offer of the car.

Yet, all the time his one desire was to be alone that he might look for Phyllis, and, when at last she was forced to leave him to give orders about the car, he plunged through the bushes to look for her, only to find she was not there. The hoot of the car brought him up short and, heedless of all conventionalities, he turned his back on the house, found the car and Norah at his side, and five minutes later was speeding along the road to Donnisthorpe. He was in a fever and he drove like it, yet with a certain cold control that was so often an evident part of his curiously complex personality ; and when he got to the Castle, he found that he no longer wanted exercise ; the rush through the sweet freshness of the night had cleared his head and calmed his blood. He went straight to his room, saw it was just after half-past twelve, undressed with all possible speed, smoked a last cigarette as he paced up and down the spacious room ; then tossed the burning end from a window and got into bed. Sleep, unexpected and dreamless, came to him instantly, but he roused two hours later and found himself instantly wide awake.

The moon was near her setting, the leaves were stirring in the mysterious little breeze that heralds the dawn, and he realised suddenly that he did not want the dawn, did not want this wonderful night to pass. Claspings his hands behind his head, he lay staring at the

two squares of soft blue sky, watching the moonbeams leave his floor, watching the deep blue slowly fade and change to grey, from grey to lilac, from lilac to rose, shot with gold. He should have been stricken with horror at the thing he had done, but instead he was radiantly happy, and the faint self-reproach at his unfaithfulness to the woman of his memory was the only shadow upon his mind.

He had lived a lawless life too long to become an easy prey either to imagination or remorse; he loved Phyllis and Phyllis loved him—he caught his breath as he remembered those minutes alone in the moonlit garden . . . and she was lovely and desirable and passionately sweet . . . after the last ten years of his life she was like fresh cool water to a man dying of thirst in the desert.

So, for a few short hours, he kept all thought at bay, rejoicing only in the precious knowledge he held, feeling again her kisses and the clasp of her arms, living once more the rapture he had never thought to taste.

When the birds were at their noisiest and six o'clock had struck he fell asleep and dreamed of Phyllis, who, just as they clung together in their first embrace, lifted her head and he saw not her face but a face long forgotten, purposely thrust out of his life, a face pink and white, with bright blue eyes and full-lipped mouth that laughed triumphantly at his horror.

Strangling a cry of furious disgust, he awoke to find himself sitting up, his forehead wet, his heart thudding, every limb trembling. At first he could hardly realise where he was, then memory returned, but no longer joyous; and, shuddering at the recollection of his dream, he lay looking out over the hills and valleys of the park, his heart sore, his temper vile. Why should that woman have come to his dreams now, on this night of all nights; why should her face, her



voice, her personality suddenly project itself back into his consciousness after all these long years?

All his happiness was gone now and, in its place, a restless, sullen discomfort seized him.

Life had never treated him fairly. From the start the odds had been against him, and now that happiness, such as he had sometimes dared to dream of but never to hope for, was in his grasp, he would not let it be snatched from him. . . . God Himself should not take Phyllis from him. . . .

He flung over in the great four-poster bed and buried his face in his arms; tried to banish thought, tried to sleep, gave both up, and went to his bath in the worst possible temper.

He breakfasted alone in the room he remembered as a child, facing over the wide lawns and great flower-filled borders to the lake, read the papers thinking only of Phyllis and not of one word before his eyes; and too restless to keep still, made his way to the stables.

The big yard was full of sunshine and life; cats washed themselves on the clean, hard gravel, pigeons sunned their feathers, or walked about in stately indifference, horses put inquiring heads over the green-and-white doors of their loose boxes, and grooms and stable-boys went busily about the day's work. It was a cheerful scene, the trim, well-kept, well-filled stables, the glory of the morning, the life that was everywhere abundant. Gene strolled across to a groom, asked for a horse, chose a big, raking chestnut, and a few minutes later rode out of the yard leaving a groom and a stable-help both watching him. Storer, the groom, spoke first:

"So *that's* 'im, is it?" he ejaculated. "Got an uncommon high manner I *don't* think! Got an eye for a horse, too."

"Murdered a girl, didn't he?" the other, Tom, asked



in a rather awestruck voice. "Blowed if I like the look of 'im. S'pose he murders someone else!"

But Storner had a supreme contempt for underlings and let this one know it.

"Don't you be a fool!" he retorted. "What's it matter what you like? Tell me that! 'E may have done somethin'—there *was* a row, but most likely she deserved it. I don't 'old with girls anyway. They're always making trouble. You go and get me that straw—quick!"

Tom, rather injured, departed, slouching off across the yard, and the object of his speculation rode away out to the grass of the rides and had an hour's gallop—to come back about eleven and hear his brother wished to speak to him—would he go into the library.

He tossed cap, whip, and gloves aside, made his way to the library, opened the door and stood as if rooted to the floor, for Donnisthorpe was seated behind the great Chippendale writing-table, where he had last seen his father sitting, and above him hung a portrait of the late Earl—a portrait Gene had never before seen.

Lord Donnisthorpe, ninth in his line, had died when his younger son was barely fifteen years old, but Gene's memories were sharp and clear. He had not loved, perhaps, so much as respected, the stern fine old man whose son he was, but he had always known him kindly, if severe, always just—the quality above all others that appeals to a child.

The portrait, painted by a master hand, showed an elderly man sitting in a big leather arm-chair, one hand holding a book with a finger between the pages, in an attitude vividly familiar; the figure broad-shouldered yet spare, showed vitality and health despite seventy-odd years, and the face, clean-shaven save for small white side-whiskers, with fine aquiline features, showed

yet something more—a fine and splendid soul looking out through the eyes.

There was a serene beauty about the face, a dignity, not of birth alone, in the poise of the white head; and the unexpected vision of his father that the portrait called up struck Gene through all his armour of lawless, bitter hardness to the very heart. Yet the man who sat watching him so intently never guessed the pain that had stabbed him; Gene had learned long ago, in a hard school, to hide his feelings, and the only sign he gave, had Donnisthorpe been able to read it, was a slight hardening of the already close-shut lips, and a shade more arrogance in the carriage of head and shoulders.

“You wished to see me?” he said. “Is that so?”

Donnisthorpe nodded, and for a moment did not speak, so Gene dropped into a chair, lit a cigar, and waited; being careful now to keep his eyes from the portrait above his brother’s head.

As for Donnisthorpe, a sudden impatience seized him. Gene had dishonoured his name, but he, Donnisthorpe, had had to face that dishonour while the culprit escaped scot-free to a new life; and now, years later, returned to inherit money, and sat there apparently unconcerned, unashamed, his long legs, in their riding-breeches and high brown boots, thrust straight out before him, the cigar between his lips—he had lived long enough in the middle West to attain the habit—his eyes inscrutable beneath their slightly frowning brows gazing out of the big oriel window. His indifference sent a sudden spasm of irritation through his brother’s nerves, and his voice was harsh as he broke the silence.

“What are you proposing to do with yourself?”

Slowly, as if infinitely wearied by a childish question.

Gene let his glance travel from the great window with its ancient stained glass, to his brother's face. Without removing the cigar he spoke as slowly.

"How the hell do I know?"

Donnisthorpe bit his lip. The answer was what he might have expected, and it annoyed him to realise how easily Gene could rouse his temper—as easily as in the old days, although he had thought himself master of himself.

Now he made no reply for a few minutes, but pushing back his chair, went over to the window and stood looking out.

Below was a wide terrace with a balustrade of ancient stone, and beyond a lawn studded with splendid trees and opening on to a hill-side that sloped downwards into a long, wide valley; beneath the trees in the park he could see deer feeding, and far away was a glimpse of blue sea. It was a wonderful stretch of broad acres and fine timber, and it belonged to him and would one day belong to his brother. The thought was not pleasant. There was nothing in Gene that promised good ownership, no sense of responsibility or dignity, no understanding of the problems of present-day life; and behind him always lay that stain on his name that had killed his father. It was a minute or two before he felt able to speak quite calmly, and, when he did so, it was to see Gene in precisely the same attitude, apparently quite unconcerned with his brother's mood.

"You must have some plans," he said, as patiently as he could. "Do you intend to stay here or in town, or return to America? I ask because I must make certain arrangements myself and they depend somewhat upon yours."

Gene took his cigar from his lips and smiled very faintly.

"I appreciate your consideration," he said, "but it doesn't help. I came over here because you wrote that it was necessary. Well, I'm here. The rest is up to you."

The slightly mocking inflection of voice was not lost upon Donnisthorpe, but now he had mastered his temper; sitting down by the great writing-table he took Gene at his word.

"Very well," he said. "Then you had better go to town and see Mr. Fordholm; he has all particulars of your godmother's bequest to you. The amount, I believe, is about £60,000 in Government Stock and Kimberley Mines; with £30,000, or so, in property that can be realised. After that, if you care to spend the rest of the summer here please do so. If you intend settling elsewhere in England, or returning to the United States, be good enough to acquaint me with your plans."

He paused a moment, and, wondering if he had been a little less than courteous, added rather stiffly:

"Of course this is your home as much as mine, and if you elect to stay here I shall be equally pleased. If I can do anything in any way please let me know."

A faint, ironical smile flickered for a moment round Gene's mouth; then he rose lazily and stifled a yawn.

"A most correct and brotherly speech," he said mockingly. "Please accept my thanks—and congratulations, since I know how difficult it must have been for you to make it. I intended to return on the White Star boat, sailing next Wednesday, but something has happened to make me change my plans. I fear I must avail myself of your cordial invitation to remain here for a few days while I make my plans. A thousand apologies!"

He went out of the room before Donnisthorpe could reply, with that slow, easy movement that was so much swifter than it appeared, and out of the house into the sunshine, the mocking smile gone from his lips, leaving only the savage resentment that settled at his heart.

PHYLLIS had passed a night even less reposeful, and, towards the dawn, feverish unrest drove her from her tumbled bed to the seat of the wide casement window, where she sat among cushions, leaning her arms on the sill.

The dawn had not yet broken, but the eastern sky was paling, and the stars, big, and very bright, seemed nearer than in the early hours of the night ; the gardens were very still, not a breath stirred leaf or blossoms, and only the melancholy hoot of an owl somewhere beyond the lawn broke the stillness. She had waited so long, had suffered so keenly in her love for Gene that the knowledge of his love for her left her confused both in mind and body, excited beyond measure, unable to rest or even to remain very still, feverishly happy and utterly careless of the future. That brief time in the garden, crushed in his arms, with the fire of his kisses against her mouth, had been the gateway to knowledge that altered the whole world for her, and waves of emotion swept her as she recalled that sudden ecstasy of love and passion ; and thought of what life held for her and the man she loved.

She fell into a doze as the stars paled, woke and stumbled to her bed when the birds began to grow noisy, and slept again as the sun rose, not waking till the maid placed her tea beside her and spoke her name.



At breakfast she found Leon very silent and abstracted, wondered why and promptly forgot all about him, and, Maurice not being down, escaped his keener perceptions.

She gave her household orders like one in a dream, and was only roused to the realisation of her surroundings by seeing a look of indignation upon Mrs. Cutler's face. Mrs. Cutler had been cook at the Manor for fifteen years, but never before had she been faced by the problem that now confronted her—a smiling “Just what you like, Mrs. Cutler. There may be two extra to dinner,” when she had just informed her young mistress that the raspberries were spoiling on their stalks and she wanting to make jam “on account of them bein’ short handed in the kitchen and Adams—the under-gardener—having sprained his ankle—drat the man.”

Her look of righteous wrath pulled Phyllis up, and she hastened to repair her error.

“The children shall help me pick some of them,” she said. “Perhaps we could get one of the stable-boys. I’ll see,” and fled from Mrs. Cutler’s majestic and outraged presence.

She found the children, Ronnie, Judy, and Angela, plotting some wickedness in the orchard, enlisted their help, and half an hour later was amongst the raspberry-canecanes picking industriously.

Though not yet eleven o’clock it was a very hot morning; the sun blazed down from a cloudless sky, the high canes shut away all breeze and a myriad midges attacked ankles, wrists, and knees, yet Phyllis picked on in a daze of happiness, her thoughts far away from the discomforts of her occupation, living over and over again the wonderful hour last night, unable to believe it true . . . yet knowing by racing

pulses and quickening breath that it was actual and no dream.

Judy's cry, "Ronnie! You've hardly picked any!" and Angela's shrill, "His basket was half-full a minute or two ago!" penetrated Phyllis's dream at last, and starting she straightened her back, opened her eyes and realised that she was excessively hot and tired. Judy, pushing down the lanes of bushes, carried a large basket and held it out dramatically.

"Look!" she exclaimed, and, looking, Phyllis perceived a few squashed remnants of fruit at the bottom of the basket.

"Well—who's——" she was beginning, when Angela's voice came from near-by, uplifted in tones of shocked superiority.

"Well, don't come near me if you want to be sick! I think you're a horrid little boy—and dreadfully greedy."

Ronnie's voice answered, hotly indignant:

"There's pounds and pounds here! Why shouldn't I? We're always allowed to eat what fruit we like as long as it's ripe."

Angela's reply was terse, but lacking in polish, ending with, "Greedy-guts!" and a sudden violent agitation among the leaves proclaimed the outbreak of physical violence, whereupon Phyllis put her basket in a place of safety, called both protagonists on to the path and surveyed them impartially.

Angela, who nearly always wore some shade of blue, was attired in a blue linen smock and sandals, her slim legs (one bandaged) innocent of sock or stocking, her red head bare, raspberry juice, green smear from leaves, and dusty earth plentifully distributed about clothes and skin alike, while Ronnie's tussore smock and knickers shared the same fate.

"Ronnie!" Phyllis's tone was severe. "Have you really eaten the basketful?"

Ronnie was an imp, but a truthful one.

"Yes," he admitted, "but I thought it didn't matter."

"Of course it mattered! It's for jam!"

The irrepressible Angela cried, "Judy told you——"

"No skimmings for you, that's all," Phyllis stated—the "skimmings" of each boiling of jam being nursery perquisite and as such passionately claimed by the children.

"It's after twelve. Go and have your swim—and you too, Angela!"

They went off still arguing, and Judy looked at Phyllis.

"You look awfully tired. Don't pick any more," she said. "Did you have a jolly time last night at Aunt Norah's?"

"Very." Try as she would, Phyllis felt the colour deepen in her cheeks, whereupon Judy sighed loudly.

"How I wish I was old enough to come out!" she said. "Three whole years, nearly four! It's an awfully long time, Phyllis!"

"It will go very quickly," Phyllis said consolingly. "You are fourteen now, Judy, and you are going to school next term. You'll like that."

"Yes. I know—at least I suppose so, but I hate the idea of leaving home and living all the time with a lot of girls—we've always had such a jolly time. Lots of people . . . I want to grow up. Oh, how hot it is! Have we picked enough?"

"I think so," Phyllis said, looking at the child's flushed face. "Go into the shade and cool a little before you swim. I'll take the baskets in."

"I'll help you," Judy replied, and insisted on

taking her share of the labour and carrying a heavy basket of fruit to the kitchen. Then she went off to join the others, and Phyllis changed her fruit-stained frock and went down to the garden.

The radiant happiness of the earlier hours was fading; she could not help wondering why no word had come from Gene; it was twelve o'clock . . . why did he not telephone . . . or come? She found herself unable to sit still, and began wandering about the gardens, hearing from the swimming-pool that Hugh had built for his children the shouts and squeals of laughter from the three youngsters. Hugh would be back in the late afternoon with his wife, and, try as she would, she could not feel sore-hearted at the change his marriage must mean; reaction from the tremendous emotion of the last twenty-four hours brought physical and mental weariness, and Gene's silence added to both.

"If I never see him again, I'm glad I had that hour," she said to herself, speaking half aloud. "No one can take that away. Not even Gene . . . and he knows how I love him. . . ."

Maurice, coming down late, came out into the sunshine with a book and the papers, saw Phyllis and limped across to join her, and, though she would have preferred to be left alone, she could frame no suitable excuse, so called up a smile.

He dropped into a chair, made some casual remark about the great heat and then relapsed into silence, not even pretending to read, until Phyllis, struck by the worn look on his face, asked him what was wrong. He started at that and looked at her.

"I heard from Leon that Hugon was at Aunt Norah's last night," he said. "You don't remember him, I suppose—what does he look like now?"

Phyllis wondered if her pallor would betray her, but managed to answer composedly enough.

"No, I don't remember him before he left England. He looks his age now—I suppose he's handsome in a hard, fierce kind of way."

"Did he—mention what he'd been doing?"

"No. You were very great friends, weren't you, Maurice?"

Maurice moved restlessly.

"Yes, very."

"Why didn't you stand by him when the smash came? What was it exactly?"

"He gave no one any chance," Maurice answered curtly. "Look here—it's over. Done with. Why need we talk about it? I suppose Hugon won't be staying down here long."

There was a moment's silence, then, making up her mind, she spoke definitely.

"One's past is never really done with. And it is not fair to speak so constantly against a man as people speak against Gene——"

"Gene?" Maurice turned sharply. "Do you call him Gene?"

Phyllis, aware of the quick suspicion in her brother's look and question, forced herself to calmness.

"My dear Maurice, what is the matter? Everybody talks about Gene Hugon—it seems to me no one else is of any interest, so why shouldn't I call him by his Christian name if I like? Please don't be quite so imperative."

Her tone reassured him, and, after an instant, he apologised.

"Sorry, Phyllis. To tell you the truth I'm on edge. Hugon and I parted in no very pleasant circumstances, and I don't look forward to meeting him again. That's all."

"I understand, but I'm afraid you'll have to meet him, for Hugh said he should ask him here. He told Uncle Hilary. I think I'm going indoors, it's too hot out here."

Restlessness drove her to the cool, flower-scented drawing-room, where she sat down at the piano and began to practise Beethoven, which occupation entirely occupied mind and body till luncheon was announced. During the afternoon she had several things to do, but half an hour before Hugh was expected, as she sat writing a note, a maid appeared.

"Mr. Hugon wishes to know if he may speak to you, Miss Phyllis. He's holding the wire."

Phyllis's heart gave a great throb and then seemed to stop beating; she felt rather than saw Leon's look of surprise as she went out of the drawing-room into the library where the telephone was.

The room was empty and she closed the door thankfully, picked up the receiver and spoke as steadily as she could.

"Is that you? Phyllis speaking."

Back along the wire came the dear voice, with its faint Western drawl.

"Gene here. May I come over? I can't wait about like this without seeing you. . . . I want you. Do you want me?"

"*Want* you?" Her voice shook suddenly and she caught the edge of the table to steady herself. "Oh, my dear! I want you more than the whole world!"

She heard a sound at the other end, his voice came thickly.

"Oh, God—how I love you! I'm coming—when shall I come?"

Phyllis, trying to steady her voice, said:

"Come to dinner. I want my father to know."



She sat staring at the telephone, trying to calm her racing pulses. She could form no idea of the meeting, or of what might follow it, and she did not care. He was coming. She would see him again, feel the burning heat of his kisses, the clasp of his arms—nothing else mattered in heaven or earth.

"YOU'LL find this teapot dreadfully heavy, Joyce! I should make Hugh give me a lighter one if I were you!"

So Phyllis, sitting for the last time behind the Queen Anne tea-tray in the cool, shadowy greenness of the drawing-room; and Hugh, quick to appreciate the significance of the remark, smiled across at his daughter in quick recognition of her tact.

The smile sent a warm little thrill of happiness through Phyllis. Hugh understood, as he always did, and somehow she felt he would understand even Gene and herself.

The travellers had been in about an hour. Joyce, very radiant and pretty, sat near her stepdaughter. Leon waited on her, Maurice, his two sticks resting against his chair, was by the farther window talking to Hugh and stirring the ice in his tall glass, preferring a long drink to tea; and Judy and Angela were also present, Judy in a soft white frock and spotless white shoes, Angela in palest blue crêpe de Chine, looking like her name and behaving so well that her mother began to be nervous and wonder if the child were ill. The home-coming had been quite delightful. Hugh looked radiant, Joyce charming, and secretly everyone was relieved that Cathleen was still away. There were the usual inquiries on all sides, and now, in the first pause, Phyllis made her announcement.

"We may have a very unexpected guest to dine."

she said, rather loudly, so that both Hugh and Maurice in their far window should hear. "He telephoned to know if he could come over. Your brother, Joyce."

"My brother? Donnisthorpe?" Joyce exclaimed. "Do you hear, Hugh?"

"No." Phyllis rather wondered if her voice was entirely calm. "Not Lord Donnisthorpe. Gene."

"Gene?"

"What's that?"

The two exclamations broke the silence; Joyce's echo of sheer surprise; Maurice's question sharp and stern. Even Hugh stared, and Phyllis realised she had been unnecessarily dramatic.

"Gene is staying at the Castle," she said, turning to her stepmother. "We were dining at my aunt Norah's last night and he was there. I was immensely interested to find I had met him before—in America. I mentioned it to you, didn't I, Maurice?"

She looked across at Maurice deliberately; if her family were not to be utterly dumbfounded by her choice of a husband, they had better accept Gene as a matter of course at once. But Maurice stared at her with eyes that burned in his white, strained face, and she felt suddenly a stab of anxiety for him. It was evident that, whatever the barrier between them the thought of meeting Gene again was causing Maurice acute suffering. Joyce, meanwhile, was speaking at her elbow.

"I saw Gene in town a day or two before the wedding," she said. "But he said nothing then of coming to Donnisthorpe, and I rather gathered that he intended to return to America almost at once."

"You say he was at Hilary's last night?" Hugh asked. "Will you like that, Joyce?"

Joyce looked at her husband; then at Phyllis. She knew that the former intended to welcome her

brother as though the tragedy of ten years ago had never taken place ; she had not yet had the opportunity of knowing how her stepchildren felt about it. And Phyllis, meeting the look, smiled.

" Please say yes, Joyce," she said, thus once more deliberately showing her stepmother that there was to be no jealousy or sore feeling over the delegation of authority. Whereupon Joyce, much relieved, looked at Hugh.

" How nice ! " she said happily. " I so want to see Gene again. Thank you, Phyllis."

As for Gene, he had made up his mind as to his course of action, and, that being so, it was characteristic of him that he neither hesitated nor troubled about its results. The first thing he must do was to meet Leon, for Leon had recognised him, and he could not afford to have Leon as an enemy, so he told a servant to telephone to Little Standingrydge and he himself followed the message by car.

The afternoon was very hot with the flamboyant heat of an English summer day, and, as Gene drove through the lanes that brought him by a short cut to the Manor, he contrasted the richness, the neatness, the settled look of the English countryside in comparison with the country where he had lived so long. It seemed to typify his own life in comparison with that of the woman he loved ; the one lawless, wild, so largely desolate, the other well-ordered, useful, serene. How could she love him ? How could she care so divinely for one so infinitely unworthy—for the sin of hypocrisy was one of which he had never been guilty. He knew well enough what he was, but now he determined to turn his back on the life he had led, and to that end he was driving over to Little Standingrydge.

A little way from a sidegate that led to the stables

he pulled the car into the side of the road, got out, looked at his watch and waited; he had made good time and it was five minutes before Leon appeared, turning out of the gate and walking swiftly up the hill to where Gene waited, watching him.

Neither man spoke for a moment, but measured one another with steady, appraising glances, and it was Leon who spoke first.

"Well, I'm here. What d'you want to see me about?"

Gene nodded slowly, sat down on the broad, low stile and lit a cigar. His movements were deliberate, his manner entirely composed. Irritated, sorely perplexed, angry even as he was, Leon was nevertheless deeply interested; too interested even to be as furious as he wished.

"I'm here," Gene said at last, "because I've something to say to you, and it's got to be said right now and you've got to hear it and keep quiet till I'm through. Think you can?"

Leaning against the gatepost, Leon stared at him. "How do I know?" he said at last. "Get on with it anyway."

"All right, I will." Gene took the cigar from his lips and looked fixedly at his companion. "I love your sister—and she loves me."

"What?" Leon's eyes blazed, his voice rose, he made a sudden movement, but Gene did not stir.

"Hold on a bit. I said you'd got to wait till I'm through, then you can do what you like. Listen! I'm going to tell you some things I've never told a soul and never meant to speak of, but I reckon you've got to know."

Breathing quickly, Leon said:

"Why?" And Gene shrugged his shoulders.

"Just because years ago your father was the one

man who was kind to me—who gave me the only affection or understanding I ever had—and because I want you to know something of the truth, partly for his sake, partly for mine because of—of Phyllis.”

Leon nodded.

“Go on,” he said curtly, and Gene obeyed.

“I saw you recognised me last night just as I did you,” he said; “and I want you to understand that I’m blamed sorry for having to do it, and why I did what I did that day. Listen! I told you and Carden—did you know he was dead?—that I’d met with ill-luck. Well—so I had. I’d held up the Los Angeles-Chicago train and got caught. The sheriff luckily for me happened to be a fellow I was once with in a scrap near El Paso, and he gave me a chance for my life. I’d been riding four or five days when you found me—I don’t know which—and I was out to make a fresh start and get clear out of the country. Then that fellow, Carden, recognised me, and there was nothing for it but the thing I did . . . so I did it . . . and went over the border. I went to Brazil for a bit and all over the place. Then a letter found me from Donnisthorpe . . . there was money left from a godmother. . . . I found there was no complaint lodged from you and Carden was dead, so I went straight to New York and booked for this country.”

He paused a moment, and Leon interposed quickly.

“What’s all this to do with me?” Whereupon Gene frowned.

“Someone must know more or less of the truth,” he said; “and—you saved my life that day. I haven’t forgotten. I don’t forget. And then I met your sister and things altered. . . . I’ve money now . . . it makes a difference. I love her . . . my God, how I love her! And I’m going to run straight. . . .”



Again he broke off, and Leon stared at him. He was perplexed at the whole interview, amazed at Gene's coolness, utterly dumbfounded by his words about Phyllis; and it was of Phyllis that he spoke first.

"When the devil did you meet my sister?"

Gene examined the ash of his cigar attentively.

"In America—travelling," he said. "And then not again till just before Mr. Chalmington's wedding. I told her last night."

"You—told her?" Leon echoed slowly. "You told her—how much did you tell her? What you've just told me?"

Gene looked at him.

"I'm going to tell her that presently," he said, "when I'm through with you. And I'm not through yet. . . . I was sick at having to do what I did that day, but it was my life or Carden's and there was no time for anything else."

"And you think you're the sort of man my sister should marry?" Leon said. "You expect—"

"I expect nothing!" Gene interrupted sharply. "When you were at a public school I was on trial for my life! I was acquitted—oh yes, I might as well have been condemned. Better. I'd have had a chance perhaps to make good the other side. As it was, the law told me I was innocent, and society branded me as guilty. I stuck it as long as I could; then I cleared out. All that's ancient history. Well, I went to New York. What I did there doesn't matter to you, or anyone except Phyllis. And I went under. There wasn't much likelihood that I should do anything else. I'd no money and the scandal had preceded me. I drifted West after a year, saw some rough-and-tumble fighting up and down Mexico, found I could handle men some, and turned my

attention to getting money. I needed it in those days pretty badly. Well, I got it. And, in the end, the law got me. The rest you know."

His voice was level, steady, coolly indifferent. He might have been retailing a story of heroic endeavour or speaking about an entire stranger, and his calmness infuriated his companion. With a sharp exclamation Leon started to his feet.

"And on top of that you dare tell me you love my sister? You dog!"

There was a choking gasp from Gene as he sprang up, and, for a second, his eyes held murder; then, breathing unsteadily, he drew back, grasping at the top of the stile.

"Don't say that again," he said thickly. "I know just as well as you do what you think—but it's up to *her* to say it. Go to your father, if you like—tell him! Tell him all I've told you—tell anyone—do what you damn well please. Do you think I care? If Phyllis can love me when I've told her what I'm going to tell her, the whole lot of you can go to hell."

For a little while there was absolute silence. Gene tossed his cigar-end away and sat looking at nothing, eyes and thoughts remote, his momentary violence over, while Leon leant back against the gatepost and, staring at him, concentrated his thoughts on what he had heard. Coupled with his father's story of Gene, it was intensely interesting; coupled again with what he himself knew, it was vital in its importance. That Gene was a criminal now, whatever he had been when the law first got him into its clutches, was only too true; but everything, to Leon's way of thinking, depended on that first act. Was he guilty, or innocent? And, if he were innocent, who was the scoundrel who had stood by and let an innocent man be ruined?—

for ruined he must be after the ordeal of such a trial. Leon was conscious of an odd feeling of suspense as if the solution to that question lay very near to his hand if he dare but search for it—and sub-consciously he knew he dared not search, dared not even contemplate the question itself too long. Of Gene's behaviour to himself he thought nothing at all; he had been long enough in the West to know that it is seldom safe to take chances, and that occasions call for action and no hesitation. Gene saw capture, very likely the rope, after he had been given his chance of freedom. He was desperate, and desperate men stick at little. What troubled Leon was his openly confessed love for Phyllis while that ten-year-old crime still shadowed him. If he were innocent did he know the guilty man? If he did—again Leon pulled up his thought, this time with a little shiver. . . . And Phyllis was not a child. She was not even a very young girl. She was old enough to know what kind of a man she wished to marry, old enough to have experience of the world . . . what would Hugh say?

Quite suddenly Leon spoke: so suddenly that he could hardly believe it his own voice that asked the question:

“ Why didn't you call Maurice at the trial? ”

The question was utterly unexpected, and it caught Gene off his guard; he started violently, opened his mouth to speak, checked the words on his very lips, his face whitening under its bronze. He stared at Leon with eyes dilated till hardly a rim of grey showed round the blackness of the pupil. When at last he spoke he moistened his dry lips and his voice was hoarse.

“ What good could Maurice have done? Maurice had nothing to do with it.”

“ No? ” Leon's gaze was as steady as his. “ I

thought you'd say that. Well—now you've told me, what do you want me to do ? ”

Gene got to his feet, straightened his shoulders, and looked Leon full in the eyes.

“ Keep quiet and give me my chance ! ” he said slowly—“ that's all. You know now, and you can watch all you like that no harm's done. I told you so's you could. But give me my chance—for God's sake ! ”

For the first time in all that curious meeting his voice shook on the last three words, betraying the tumult that surged beneath his hard self-control, and, at that sudden break, at the momentary betrayal of eyes and mouth, Leon's generous nature responded and he made his decision. With a quick movement he held out his hand.

“ All right, I'll do it ! ” he said. “ Right or wrong you shall have your chance ! ”

He thought his hand was crushed, strong as he was, by Gene's grip, and, the next moment, embarrassed like all Englishmen by any show of emotion in himself, or others, he swung on his heel and went off down the road, leaving Gene to stand staring at the bonnet of his car, twisting his cap in his fingers.

PHYLLIS dressed early, put on the same clinging frock of white and silver and went downstairs ; she guessed Gene would arrive before anyone else, and, standing by herself in the open window that commanded the drive, she heard the approach of a car, saw it round the bend, and, knowing it his, felt her knees give way.

Every nerve in her body trembled ; she sat down on the edge of a low sofa simply because she was shaking too much to stand. Then the door opened, a maid announced him, and Gene entered.

For a moment he thought there was no one in the room ; then he heard his name, saw her rise from the sofa and was across the room in an instant.

“ Phyllis ! dearest—dearest ! ”

He crushed her against his body and she could feel the thudding beat of his heart against her breast, shaking him as the piston-rod of a great engine shakes its prison house, and all the world went dark for him and passion surged into something even stronger, the fierceness of possession that will kill, but never resign, what is once its own.

He released her when voices were heard outside, stepped back breathing rather quickly, and into the room came Hugh Chalmington, followed by a man, tall and dark and very pale, who leaned heavily on two sticks as he walked.

Hugh saw his guest, frowned because the light close

by prevented him for the moment seeing who it was, then came straight over and held out his hand.

"My dear Gene!" he said, and his tone said far more than his conventional words of greeting. "I'm more than glad to welcome you home!"

Phyllis, watching intently, saw a queer look cross Gene's face as the two gripped hands, as if pain and triumph mingled, heard him say: "Thank you. I'm glad to be here," and then saw him come face to face with Maurice and instantly, as certainly as though she had been told, knew that here lay the true secret of Gene's life; that between these two men was knowledge that no one else possessed, a knowledge that for some unknown reason had driven one man to the wilds, and had made of the other a self-centred, embittered invalid.

Yet to anyone whose perceptions were less sharp there was nothing very significant in the meeting; merely a slight start on Gene's part as he saw the sticks and realised the lameness, and, on Maurice's, a sudden stillness as though he was confronted by something that for the moment paralysed thought and action. Then they uttered a conventional greeting, and the moment's awkwardness passed with the advent of Joyce, who hurried to Gene and touched his arm.

"Gene, dear! How delightful to see you again! Kiss me!"

He turned to her, kissed her on the cheek, answered her eager questions, and then went over to where Phyllis sat, and stood by her side just as Leon, for whom they were waiting, came in with hasty apologies.

"So sorry, Joyce. I had no idea I stayed so long in my bath. Hullo, Gene! Glad to see you!"

He smiled, the frank, boyish smile that made his rather ugly face so attractive, and, as they all went in to



dinner, laid a hand for a moment on Gene's shoulder and gave it a friendly pressure. Leon never did things by halves. Dinner passed pleasantly enough, though Gene did not talk much and Maurice hardly spoke, but Leon took a double share of the burden. Joyce was gay, Hugh an excellent host as ever, and Phyllis, her colour slightly heightened, her eyes softly radiant, was at her best. Afterwards there was bridge, but both Gene and Phyllis cut out, much to their satisfaction, and wandered out into the garden.

There, once beyond the light from the windows, Gene caught her in his arms.

"I can't stand for this," he said hoarsely. "I've got to tell your father. If I don't we shall never have a moment to ourselves except those we snatch."

"I . . . dread telling Hugh," Phyllis said, stroking the revers of his coat. "Not because . . ." she broke off suddenly, and looked up into his face, dimly seen, for the night was overcast.

"You see Hugh can't refuse his consent. I'm over age, but I do dislike the thought of disagreement with him."

"You think he will disagree, then? But of course he must. See here, sweetheart, I want to talk to you. Not just like this. I've got to keep my head and know what I'm doing, and here—like this—I can't. Will you meet me somewhere to-morrow? Anywhere so long as it's private."

"I wish it were not so far to Donnisthorpe. The park would be the best. I know. I'll ride over, Gene, and you shall meet me and we'll have our talk."

"I'll meet you at the South Lodge, then, at three. Can you be there so early?"

"Better say half-past. What is it you want to say to me, Gene?"

"A good deal," said he, rather grimly. "About

myself. And afterwards—well, perhaps there won't be any afterwards for me."

"What do you mean?" she asked, in quick anxiety. "What are you trying to say to me?"

He smoothed back her hair, touching it tenderly with a hand still hard from its rough usage.

"Just that you mayn't care to have your father, or anyone, know anything about—us—this—after I'm through with telling you," he said. "Phyllis—it's not going to be pleasant hearing—or telling."

Untroubled, she lifted her hands and laid them on his shoulders, looking into his eyes with steady, level gaze.

"You needn't be afraid," she said quietly. "I think I shall understand better than you guess, dearest. Only tell me. And . . . love me, Gene. That's all I want!"

Two minutes before the half-hour Phyllis rode up the last stretch of the winding side road that led past that lodge where she was to meet Gene and saw him mounted on a big chestnut mare, waiting for her. She felt a little quickening thrill of pulse and nerve at sight of him, thought how completely he and his horse seemed one, and quickened her own horse's pace to a sharp canter.

They met near the little thatched lodge, walked their horses through the gate, and, after riding for half a mile or so along the roadway, turned down a grass ride leading away to the left. Gene spoke little, but his eyes constantly dwelt on Phyllis, on her slender body in its holland coat, sitting so straightly in the saddle. Her fair, serious face under the broad-brimmed felt hat pulled over her bright hair. She looked very workmanlike and attractive in brown breeches and top boots, and once, meeting Gene's eyes, her own shone, she coloured hotly, then grew very pale, and half unconsciously urged her horse to faster gait. She was aware of the tension of her nerves as she awaited his confession, and she was glad when at last he suggested dismounting and leaving the horses. He took off their bridles, made long enough tethers with the reins to loop over a bough, and left them to graze in shady comfort.

Without a word she accompanied him beneath blossoming lime-trees, which scented the air, and along

a short avenue of blossoming red chestnuts, into a glade carpeted with moss and finest turf.

In its centre, overgrown with moss and tangled, neglected roses, was the broken balustrade of an ancient pool, covered now with water lilies and centred by the lichen-covered figure of a little cupid holding a broken vase, and from the vase's lip the water still dripped as it had dripped for years, gently, rhythmically, a single note of music stirring, rather than breaking, the dreamy silence of the place.

A low, curved seat of stone with roses and twisting honeysuckle climbing along its back was at one side, and, as they sat down there, they looked across through a short hundred yards of blossoming lime avenue to the place where the horses fed contentedly; and Phyllis saw that short avenues, overgrown now and sadly neglected, led like spokes of a wheel to other glades and ancient gardens long left to ruin.

"Oh!" she said, very softly, "how beautiful it is! I have never been here before. How very beautiful!"

Gene, looking ahead of him with narrowed eyes, nodded.

"Yes. I used to think of this garden when I was in the desert country," he said. "I used to come here as a boy. I wish you had lived at Little Standingrydge then, Phyllis."

"We were in France till I was fifteen, and then I went back there to school. What a place to dream in! Gene—I wonder how many lovers have walked and dreamed here!"

He shot a quick glance at her. She was not looking at him, but away into the mossy distance where the sunshine made chequered patches of golden light on centuries-old turf, where the deep pure-blue sky seemed to bless the green of leaves, the slender straightness of trunk and the massed blossom of shrubs and

forgotten flowers. Her face was pale, her lips slightly parted, her eyes full of dreaming wonder; and suddenly, roughly, he broke the spell of her thoughts.

"Don't talk like that! I didn't bring you here to make love to you. I can't—till I've told you what I've got to tell you. And then . . . maybe, you won't want me to, ever again."

His tone startled her, so that she turned to him in quick distress, but, at the sight of his face, she checked the impulse, drew back into a corner of the seat and spoke quietly as if his words had been just what she expected to hear.

"Then tell me now—just the truth. I'm ready."

He nodded, twisting the soft brim of his hat between his hands.

"Sure. I'll tell you. You know something, I suppose, of what happened—years ago?"

"Yes," Phyllis said, "a little. I know you were accused and tried for—because of—a girl——"

"A girl committed suicide—at least whether it was suicide or not was the question. I don't want to excuse myself. I was crazy over her. She was a dancer. I wanted to marry her. . . . Well . . . then I found out she was living with . . . Maurice as well as with me. We had a pretty bad quarrel he and I . . . in her room. And the next morning she was dead."

Phyllis, hands rather tightly locked together, schooled her voice to the tone of conventional interest.

"You had a quarrel with Maurice before her, then? In her rooms?"

"Sure. And with her too."

"And—afterwards?"

"Maurice left. When I woke in the morning—she was dead."

"You mean—you stayed with her?"

"Yes. She cried and begged me to forgive her . . . and I was mad over her. . . ."

"You stayed—all night?"

He moved, suddenly restless, and, getting to his feet, stood looking at the little splashing fountain.

"It was late then—midnight. Yes, I stayed."

He spoke through set teeth, as if even now the memory seared him, and Phyllis, white-lipped and very still, waited for what he should say next.

"I went to sleep somewhere about two. When I woke it was seven—and she was so quiet and still that I was scared. I tried to wake her. Then I knew. They arrested me—I stood my trial. It was proved that she drugged and there were no signs of violence. And a girl in the next flat gave evidence that she'd heard us quarrelling. . . . They acquitted me because there was no actual evidence to convict me. I stood it for a few days. Then I cleared out. My record wasn't particularly bright and it went against me. I was cashiered, asked to resign my clubs. Oh, the usual thing. And Donnisthorpe was hard hit. So I went off. I was pretty average green in those days and I thought anyone could make a living in the States if he didn't mind working hard. . . . Well, I was soon put wise. I did some pretty hard thinking in New York before I let out for the middle West. . . . There was a row over play in an hotel . . . that started it, but I cleared a couple of hundred dollars——"

Phyllis, white-lipped, interrupted him.

"You mean you—cheated at cards?"

At the unbelieving horror of her tone he swung round facing her.

"Sure thing," he said savagely. "I told you I'd some pretty hard things to say. Yes, I cheated at cards. I'd have done worse by that time if I'd known what to do to get money quick. I was hungry."



The incredulous dismay died out of her face ; tradition of what a man may, or may not do, loosed its hold. With a quick movement she held out her hands to him.

" Oh, my dear ! If I had only known ! "

He looked at her, caught her hands, carried them to his lips ; then, before he had kissed them, let go and drew back.

" Don't do that ! " he said harshly. " If you look at me . . . speak to me . . . like that I shall never have the courage to tell you everything. "

She drew back, her eyes gravely considering him.

" Very well, Gene. Only, my dear . . . remember—I am not judging you. "

He made some indistinct answer, was silent a minute, then went on.

" After a while I drifted out to the middle West ; then I rode for a while for a man that had a big ranch in Kansas, but that didn't last. Later I got further south and joined the hands that were bringing a big herd up the Long Trail. That's from the mouth of the Rio Grande, where the herd was to be met from old Mexico for delivery on the Blackfoot Agency in the north-west corner of Montana. It's a big distance and it was my first experience of the trail. Just before we reached Montana a chap I had known in New York told the boss—that's what he's known as—what sort of a guy he considered me. That wouldn't have mattered if one of the men hadn't overheard and picked a quarrel. We fought and I shot him up. That ended my job, and being up against it, good and hard, I joined a band of outlaws who had their stronghold in the Black Mountains in a lonely corner of Arizona. Gradually I worked up ; had some narrow escapes, and some good luck too, and finally got command of the band. We'd a pretty exciting time one

way and another, and we got a lot of money. We got, too, to be pretty well known—and respected!” He laughed shortly at some memory. “And there was a big reward offered for my capture, dead or alive. There came a day when we planned to hold up the Los Angeles-Chicago mail, and we did it too. But somebody had blown the gaff on us, and there were troops on the train waiting for us. We were beaten, and I was knocked on the head and put in the train—What?”

He broke off sharply, for Phyllis had uttered an exclamation, and, jerking up his head, he looked at her.

“What’s that?”

“I said I knew,” Phyllis said very quietly. “I was on that train, Gene. Don’t you remember me?”

His hat fell from his restless fingers, and for a second or two, still and rigid as though carved in stone, he stared at her. Then:

“What’s that?” he repeated, hardly above his breath. “What’s that? You were on that train. . . . You . . . were . . . on. . . .”

Very gently she interrupted him.

“Yes. Your head was hurt . . . that was when I met you. . . . Gene . . . my darling!”

One minute longer he stared at her, rocking where he stood; then, with a choking sound, he stumbled to her open arms, dropped down at her feet, his hands clutching at her shoulder, pressing close against her in the blessed safety and tenderness of her close embrace.

Presently, his face pressed against her breast, he spoke unsteadily.

“I dreamed of you . . . all those years . . . and I could never see your face. Always it was hidden . . . blurred. . . . Phyllis . . . Phyllis . . . when I told you I loved you . . . it seemed that I was disloyal to my dream-woman. . . .”

Later he spoke again, telling her of his rescue by Leon, its result, and his conversation with Leon the previous day; and then, for awhile, they spoke but little and only of their love for one another.

It was late when at last, his arm through hers, they walked slowly down the lime avenue to the waiting horses, and the shadows lay long and level beneath the branches and the birds awakening after the great heat of the day trilled and sang all about them.

Leaning across from her saddle, she laid her hand for a moment on his arm.

"There's nothing more between us now, Gene. You must tell Hugh of our engagement—tell everyone. I'm proud you love me, and I want the whole world to know."

He bent and kissed her hand.

"I'll see Mr. Chalmington to-morrow," he said a little hoarsely. "I'm not worth it, dear. Don't say those things to me. They make me ashamed."

HUGH CHALMINGTON stood at the entrance to his farm scanning the stretch of land about him, occasionally making some remark to his bailiff who stood at his side.

"The spring in the Long Meadows is run quite dry," the latter was saying "It's not been dry for fifteen years, and the big pond is two feet lower than it was in 1908."

Hugh nodded. The continued drought was working havoc with the land; the cattle were already feeling it, the pasture was dry and cracked, the leaves withering, the washing of cars and carriages that usually filled the big cobbled yard with cheerful splashings and rills of streaming water was a thing of the past, and only so many buckets were allowed for sheer necessity. Standingrydge was better off than its neighbours, for it had several springs, a big pond in the farm vicinity, and several others about the fields, and the brook that ran through the meadows a little way below the house had never been known to dry up. It was near it now. That very morning Hugh had seen only a trickle of water in the centre of its dry, cracked bed, instead of the usual two-foot-deep stream that ran swiftly between its steep, flower-garlanded banks.

The want of water, so unusual in an English summer, was becoming a serious problem in a place where the cattle alone needed large quantities; and already the gardens were a sad sight, the turf burnt brown, the

beds full of drooping, withered flowers only half come to their fulfilment.

There were other matters too that were on his mind just now : the difficulty that had arisen over Sir Abel Abraham's action in closing the footpath from Sims's farm to the high road, the feeling that was already growing up in the neighbourhood that he, Hugh, should not have sold the farm to the Jew millionaire, making a good deal of ill-feeling between tenants and landlord. There was also the knowledge that Joyce was far from well, and although her indisposition arose from the fact that she was expecting a child in the winter, her state of health was far from satisfactory. And, crowning all, was his secret worry over Phyllis's engagement to Gene Hugon.

Not that he disliked Gene. On the contrary. But Phyllis's devotion to him, and his stormy, passionate love for her taken in conjunction with what he knew of his life, did not promise well for the future. Since that day, now nearly three months ago, when Gene had come to tell him of his love for Phyllis, Hugh had been uneasy, for it seemed to him that, in some way, there was something hidden. What it was he had not the faintest idea, and he often called himself a fool for entertaining so vain a misgiving, yet neither scorn nor neglect changed it, and more than once he was on the point of asking Gene point-blank whether he was keeping anything back from him that he or Phyllis should have known. Yet on the face of it, it was impossible. Gene had been very frank ; had declared his innocence of that first wretched business in a way that put it, in Hugh's mind, beyond all doubt. Yet the uncomfortable sense of something amiss remained, and since Hugh was by nature opposed to any kind of intrigue or dissimulation the feeling troubled him. In some way the confidence that had always been so

complete between Phyllis and himself seemed to have ceased since his marriage ; she had been charming to Joyce, sweet-tempered and full of tact in a situation that was bound to present difficulties, yet the old spontaneity, the old frank comradeship was missing, and, since Gene's advent, she seemed more remote than before from him.

Cathleen too seemed listless and unlike herself, and Maurice had gone to Scotland directly after Phyllis's engagement was announced. Hugh sensed some uneasiness, and it troubled him that he could in no way formulate it.

On this particular morning he had been round the farm as usual, had inspected cowsheds, stables, and pigstyes, had blamed or commended the various men, and was now faced by the shortage of water that threatened to become serious. His mind, returning from its excursion to other problems, took in the fact that Bates was talking anxiously and that he was no alarmist.

" I've allowanced the men and they keep to it—but I reckon we'll have to let Pike and Hubbard have water from the house, sir. They've run right out and been fetching it in buckets from the spring down Half-acre meadow. That's run dry now, and yesterday they were drinking well water from the stable-yard."

" Good heavens ! they mustn't do that ! " Hugh exclaimed, his attention thoroughly caught. " We shall have typhoid, or worse, if they drink that. I'd better see them myself. We'll go along there now. How's the corn in the valley fields ? Any good ? "

" Wants rain to swell it, like everything else," Bates said gloomily as they walked up the yard to the two half-timbered cottages Hugh had built for the head cowman and the horsekeeper. " Garden stuff's pretty bad, isn't it, sir ? "



They discussed matters till they reached the cottages, where Hugh went in and interviewed the respective wives, made them promise that no water should be drunk from the stable well, and arranged that a bucket of drinking-water should be supplied every day from the Manor, the eldest Pike boy, aged ten, to fetch it early each morning. Both women promised, and Hugh could only hope they would keep their word. There was talk of fire-risk on the moor, and he tramped off to inspect the break that Leon, remembering his Western experience, had insisted on cutting where the heather joined their own fields, and on his way met Gene coming over to luncheon at the Manor. And, shortly after, Colonel Daltry driving over from his house to Great Standingrydge four miles off to meet some friends who were expected for the week-end. He drew up on seeing Hugh, discussed for a few moments the all-absorbing topic of the drought, mentioned that his friends were coming for the week-end, received a casual invitation, "Why not come over for tea on Sunday," and drove on, leaving Hugh little guessing how tragic would be the result of that lightly given invitation.

Gene was coming over to luncheon, and about twelve Phyllis, who had been playing tennis, went upstairs to change, and, ready to go down again, remembering that she had lent Cathleen a long diamond bar brooch she wanted to wear, knocked at her door and entered. Cathleen had evidently not heard her come in, for she was standing before the big wide-open window, and at Phyllis's voice started violently and, turning round, showed her face pale and drawn with lines of worry or suffering.

"I didn't hear you come in," she said, in excuse for her jump. "Your brooch? So sorry. It's on the pincushion."

Phyllis went to the dressing-table, found the brooch,

and then glanced at her sister, who had resumed her staring into space, an unlit cigarette between the fingers of one hand, the other bracketed on her hip. She was wearing a soft, clinging frock of tangerine hue and, for a moment, Phyllis wondered if that was the reason of her apparent pallor ; then she saw Cathleen's mouth curve bitterly, a long silent sigh sag her shoulders, and was certain that something was amiss.

She took the brooch, searching for some excuse to detain her. Then saw a jumper lying on the bed and said :

"What a lovely pale blue this is, Cathleen ! Where did you get it ?

Cathleen half-turned her head and glanced carelessly at the soft silken thing her sister held up.

"While I was in town," she said. "Denise had one like it in yellow." Cathleen usually cared so much about her clothes that her indifference was quite enough to confirm Phyllis's suspicions that something was wrong, but she was not an easy person to question directly and Phyllis resisted the temptation to do so.

"You are coming to the Flower Show on Friday, aren't you ?" she said, unwilling to depart, yet not desirous of irritating her sister. Whereupon Cathleen left her absent contemplation of the garden and, going to the dressing-table, took a match from a little box.

"Oh, I suppose so," she said wearily. "What futility it all is ! These mock charity shows, these pretences, these advertisements for oneself in the pretence of care for one's neighbour ! I'm sick of this modern existence we call life ! Sick of it ! What is there to any of us but the desire to be one better than one's dearest enemy ?"

The bitterness in voice and expression was so obvious that Phyllis allowed herself to remark upon it.

"You can hardly class our humble Flower Show with the entertaining of town," she said. "Are you thinking of the *matinée* you helped at?"

Cathleen shrugged her shoulders.

"That—and other things," she said. "It's all alike. Why can't people be honest? Why can't they say what they mean, do as they choose . . . express their own individual likes and dislikes? It's all pose nowadays. People pretend they wish to help their fellow-creatures when they desire newspaper and magazine notoriety; they pretend they wish to serve their country when they really desire popularity and a Cabinet Minister's social rank and prestige. They admire books because it's the fashion to admire them. take interest in an emasculated form of the latest scientific discovery, or religion, because all their acquaintances do so, pay to see absurd caricatures because it is the thing to proclaim that such crimes are a new revelation of Art. And no single one of the whole pack has the courage to laugh at the miserable hypocrisy and stand up for the old ideals, the old truths, the old revelations! I hate modernity! I wish I had lived in the Victorian forties!"

For a moment Phyllis was too amazed by Cathleen's outburst to utter a word; of all the family she had been the one to follow the latest craze, uphold most insistently, if idly, the latest theory, scoff most delicately and most often at the established code that governs the social world. She had, of them all, claimed most insistently the modern girl's complete freedom of thought and action, and the words she had just uttered were to anyone who knew her the most amazing recantation she could possibly have made.

Utterly perplexed, Phyllis sat down on the edge of the bed, looking with frowning gaze on her sister.

"You!" she said at last. "You wish you had lived

in the Victorian forties? Cathleen! What are you saying?"

"What I really think for once!" Cathleen retorted. "I am tired to death of life as it is and liberty for the taking. It isn't liberty at all. It is merely an exchange of one kind of supervision and surveillance for another, and of the two I prefer the first. We are not ready for liberty. We've been protected and cared for too long."

"But you took your liberty—you chose it——"

"I know that. I followed my type. But what right have our parents to permit this thrusting aside of their authority? Law and tradition of countless centuries have given parents certain rights over their children, and it is absurd that one generation should put those rights calmly aside. It is conceivable that parents—if they are educated, intelligent people—have a greater and more valuable experience of life than their children. Why, then, should they permit those children to ignore it, to laugh at it, to imagine that because they are young they have acquired the wisdom of the world? It is unfair, unjust; it makes for endless trouble and dissatisfaction, it upsets established order, and without established order civilisation must relinquish its hold on humanity and savagery return."

More amazed every moment Phyllis watched her sister. Cathleen was going back on every action of her life, on every expressed opinion; extremist in everything, she seemed to advocate now the most reactionary of methods, and at last, seizing upon a pause, Phyllis endeavoured to point this out.

"But you are denying the principles you've upheld all your life!" she exclaimed. "You, more than any of us, have flaunted Hugh's authority, have gone deliberately your own way, have chosen your path and decried that of former generations! Surely this is merely a

reaction from excess of personal choice and weariness of the rather extreme *galère* with which you have chosen to identify yourself? Mid-Victorian days with their narrow confines for a woman, their peaceful, orderly, precise methods of life, their conventional opinion, and the prudish ultra-modesty that obtained so widely could never satisfy your temperament."

Cathleen tossed her half-smoked cigarette into the grate.

"All those things were a protection against elemental facts, and, after all, it is the elemental fact that rules life, whether we surround it with jazz decorations and anæmic literature, or swathe it in muslin-draped dressing-tables, antimacassars, and lace caps. It's the elemental fact that fools us all, and we never guess it until the fooling is complete! What amusement God must get out of us!"

"Cathleen!" Phyllis's tone expressed her shocked disapproval with all the frankness her sister had been arguing for. "You rail against those who belittle constituted authority, yet almost in the same breath you join their ranks!"

"Well"—Cathleen's great dark eyes were mocking, her mouth held sneering bitterness—"have you never heard of Satan rebuking sin? I am not aware that he ceases to be Satan!"

There was a minute or two's silence; the room was full of sunlit silence, a faint, warm breeze stirred its orange curtains, far away a dog barked, and a bird in the branches of the beech tree just outside one of the windows twittered sleepily, aroused from its siesta. Phyllis had moved from the bed to a low chair and sat there, hands lying loosely clasped in her lap, eyes gazing across the gardens and meadows to the far-off blue line of sea. She did not want to answer without due thought, for no platitudes would aid Cathleen;



whatever crisis she was facing she needed wisdom and foresight, and, above all, sympathy, and failure to give all three might have tragic consequences. Searching deeply for some inspiration, Phyllis felt how inadequate was her power of expressing her deeper feelings to anyone but the man she loved, how difficult to find the right words to convey her own conviction of life's meaning. When at last she spoke it was slowly and quietly as if she were searching for exact phrasing.

"If your desire for honesty of expression and purpose, for regulated authority and garnered wisdom, is sincere and not merely another pose, then you will set about achieving their observance instead of indulging in cheap cynicism. The soul that sins deliberately, yet masks its sinning with an outcry against the sins of others, is a contemptible thing. The soul that sins, whispers 'God be merciful to me, a sinner,' and girds itself to fight its weakness, seems to me one of the bravest in the world. It is the soul for which Christ lived and died and rose again. But the soul which scoffs is worse than contemptible—it is stupid—and stupidity is, I sometimes think, the worst of all faults."

She broke off her sentence. Try as she would she could not quite express what she was feeling, and Cathleen, looking across at her, smiled.

"You approve of Life," she said. "You love a man and are going to marry him. He is strong enough to enchain your whole personality, mental and physical. What would you say or do if you lost him?"

The sudden question sent a little cold shudder through Phyllis's nerves. Well enough did she realise the truth of her sister's words. Gene did indeed enchain her whole personality; yet it might be necessary some day to face life without him.

"The joy would go out of the whole world for me," she said. And, even as she spoke, felt the blood leave



lips and cheeks. "But I do not think I should curse God and die."

"And if he turned out to be unworthy? To have been a living lie? To have taken you and laughed in your absence at your giving?"

There was a flame now in the pallor of Cathleen's cheeks, a flame in her eyes; as she asked the question it seemed as if, in some way, she was breathless in her desire for the answer. Phyllis's hands pressed suddenly together cut the diamonds of Gene's ring into her fingers, yet she hardly felt it.

"I think my heart would break," she said simply. "Why do you ask me? What is it you want to know?"

"You reproved me for saying God must laugh at us," Cathleen answered, still in that breathless way. "Would you not agree with me if that happened to you?"

"I hope not. . . . It is difficult and dangerous to say what one would, or would not, do given an unknown test . . . and it is not our custom to speak easily of our faith. I do not think I should feel that way. More I would rather not say."

"You're lucky," Cathleen said, shrugging her shoulders. "Well—the elemental fact has got me—so it is hardly to be wondered that I greet it in my own way. Shall we go downstairs? It must be nearly lunch-time and you are expecting Gene."

She went over to the dressing-table, powdered, passed a comb through the soft, waving short hair about her face, and glanced at her sister.

"You look quite disturbed!" she mocked. "Or perhaps your pallor is exhaustion after my diatribe against the order of things. How humorous I must have appeared!"

She held the door open and Phyllis had no choice but to go, yet, as she followed her down to the hall,

she could not but feel that she had failed in understanding her sister's need. Something was wrong for her, some shadow was darkening life for her, and not for her only; Maurice, who persistently stayed away and wrote the briefest of letters, was anything but happy . . . and suddenly Phyllis felt afraid. Who was she that her dream should be thus fulfilled, her life so radiantly joyful a thing, when others lay under a shadow, for she herself of late felt that some strange oppression, some menace of trouble, or disaster, seemed to hover over the house.

Yet, ten minutes later, sitting in the deep, cool shade of the great cedar tree to the west of the house, with Gene, she had forgotten all about it, and anxiety and questioning perplexity had quite faded from her mind, for Gene was talking of a matter that was even more absorbing than usual—his future plans.

"I've been idle now for three months and more," he said, "and it's too long. I don't quite know what to do over here, but I'm surely determined to do something. Where do you want to live most, sweetheart? Here, or in the States?"

"I hardly know," Phyllis said meditatively, looking at the beauty of her home all about her. "Sometimes I feel I couldn't bear to leave all this, and then again I want the bigger spaces, the different opportunities, the wildnesses of the West. I think I should like a big ranch somewhere in the West, not too far from mountains and forests and flower-filled meadows like the Yosemite—I'm afraid I'm rather exigeante! But if you stay here, Gene—and I suppose you will for a little—what do you want to do?"

"I thought of buying a place—quite small—and going in for horse-breeding," he said slowly. "We might go back West later if you liked. But—unless you're crazy to do it, I'd rather wait a year or two. I

saw a place I liked immensely the other day—do you know it? Over beyond Lamington. We might ride over and see it one day.”

Phyllis had no time to express more than approval before the luncheon gong sounded, and they had to join the others. She looked a trifle anxiously at Cathleen as they sat down, feeling rather guilty at her complete absorption in Gene, and noticed at intervals that she ate practically nothing; but, even when Gene left, she had no chance to talk alone to her, for people came over to tea and tennis and she had to assist Joyce in her duties as hostess.

The next day at intervals she observed her sister, cautiously lest Cathleen should notice and resent, but with an increasing sense of anxiety, and, on the Saturday, when there was a dinner-party and small dance afterwards, she was relieved to notice that Cathleen seemed to have thrown off her heaviness of spirit and was more like her normal self. Among the guests driving over after dinner were the Daltrys and their week-end visitor, a Mrs. Macann, an extremely well-dressed, hard-faced American woman of early middle age to whom Phyllis took an instantaneous dislike.

Paul Wildringham, who was staying at a house twenty miles away, had motored over and the dance had grown, as such dances do, from the informal gathering of a few friends, to the equally informal entertainment of quite a number of people. The continued drought made the grass and paths bone dry, even for the thinnest of satin shoes; the night winds were soft and almost as warm as those of the sunlit day; the shadows beyond the beams and floods of light from the house made of the gardens a dusky mysterious country, and into it, after Phyllis had been claimed by another partner, Gene strolled, cigarette between

his lips—he was trying hard to acquire the habit of cigarette smoking.

Beyond the immediate radius of lights, laughter, and music he wandered. He found a ruined arbour, and sat down on its rickety creaking seat, content to be alone in the shadowy dusk, his thoughts roaming widely, till, suddenly, the sound of voices close by came to him while yet their owners were invisible.

“Paul! Why are you so difficult to please these days? Ever since we were in London you’ve been different—why is it? I’ve done all I can——”

The voice was Cathleen’s, so soft and wistful that, for the moment, he could not believe it hers, and, before he could get up from the low creaking seat, Wildringham’s answered hers; impatient, almost with a hint of contempt.

“Oh, my dear girl, don’t start clinging! If anyone has changed it is yourself. I always thought of you as free and untrammelled and gloriously, vitally self-sufficient. Now you are becoming like half a hundred other women, wanting to be for ever caressed and protected. I am not the protecting type, my dear child.”

“But you must be!” Cathleen’s tone held an urgency that chained Gene to the spot. He could not reveal himself now, and he would have covered his ears but for that sudden, desperate cry.

“Paul, don’t you understand? You must be! People have got to know—very soon. They’ve *go* to! Oh, *won’t* you understand what I mean?”

There was an instant’s pause. Then Wildringham’s voice spoke again, with savage violence.

“Hell! You don’t mean we’ve had such cursed bad luck as that!”

What Cathleen answered Gene did not know. He dug his fingers in his ears, forcing himself to keep

still when his hands itched to be at the other's throat, and when at last he lifted his head, all was silent and the two had evidently gone away.

Horrified by what he had heard, he stood outside the little arbour wondering what to do. His instinct was instantly to attack Wildringham, to force him to behave as a man, not as a cur, but such behaviour was impossible. Cathleen must never know that he had overheard, yet how to punish Wildringham—he saw red as he heard again the desperate entreaty in the girl's voice. . . . Back in the radius of lights and voices he looked savagely round, and could hardly believe his eyes when he saw Cathleen dancing with a young naval man from Parkmouth, with apparently nothing to trouble her.

As he stood, full in the light just within the long window, Mrs. Macann, passing with a young man he did not know, stopped before him.

"How very punctually you keep your engagements, Mr. Hugon!" she exclaimed, lips smiling, eyes coldly furious. "The last dance was mine—I hope you enjoyed yourself in the garden." And, without waiting for an answer, passed on, leaving Gene highly discomfited. Later Phyllis, noticing his silence, tried to discover its cause, and, acting on sudden impulse, he said:

"I've got to go to town for two or three days on Monday. That's enough to make any man mad, when it means leaving you behind."

And, on the Monday morning, he left Donnisthorpe and went up to town.

He ascertained where Paul Wildringham's flat was and went to call on him, but Wildringham was out, and he wandered into the Park, bored by the dusty, crowded streets and stale heat of London in early September. Later he left the Berkeley, where he



was staying, and went again to Wildringham's flat in Half-Moon Street, to find him in.

He was shown into a really beautiful Chinese room, all gold and black and wonderful old lacquer, and Wildringham rose from a low chair to meet him, some surprise on his face.

"Good evening . . . my servant tells me you called this afternoon. Do sit down. I regret I was out. Perhaps——?"

His pause was eloquent, and Gene filled it adequately.

"I've come to see you on a rather important matter," he said. "The other night at Little Standingrydge I chanced to overhear something not meant for me. Never mind how. It was an accident; and that's enough for you. But since I did hear it, I've come to ask an explanation."

During this brief speech Wildringham had been gazing at his visitor as various emotions chased each other over his heavily handsome face: amazement, concern, anger, even a hint of fear, and at its conclusion he broke into furious speech.

"What the hell do you mean? And what business have you poking your nose into my affairs?"

"You've heard what I mean. And I choose to make it my business. Now, what are you going to say?"

"Nothing, except to tell you to get out."

"Then I'm sure afraid"—Gene took a slow step forward—"you'll have to put me there. I intend to have an explanation, and I'm not quitting till I have."

For a moment mad thoughts of hitting him flashed through Wildringham's brain; then cooler sense prevailed, and the sight of Gene, tall, lithe, hard as iron, and exultantly waiting for an act of physical violence.

Leisurely he took a cigarette from a box beside him on the table, leisurely lit it, never taking his eyes from Gene's face.



"I'm afraid your experience of the criminal court and the wild woolly West have warped your judgment, Hugon," he said, a little amused, insulting smile creeping to his lips. "You see I happened to have married Cathleen Chalmington ten months ago at the Marylebone Registry Office. Is there any further information I can give you?"

Three months ago that sneer would have been struck from his lips and he would have been crying for mercy at the hands of the man who stood before him, but Gene was learning wisdom in a hard school. He knew men, and he knew that the one before him was telling the truth, and, for a moment, he hesitated as to his course of action. Then, very slowly, he spoke.

"It's a good thing for you you can tell me that," he said. "I might have made things awkward for you. As you suggest it, there *is* some further information I require, and that is your reason for putting your wife in a false position."

"I don't see quite what business it is of yours," Wildringham said, whereupon Gene laughed softly, a disconcerting sound to the other man.

"You've been good enough to refer to my experience of the wild and woolly West and the criminal courts. Well—as to the first, it's the business of any man that calls himself a man to make things like you behave decently if they can. As to the second—it's a subject I don't care about . . . and this is my answer!"

A step, a lightning-swift blow, and Wildringham was on his back on the rug, and Gene, his breath not even quickened, stood watching for him to pick himself up.

When, purple-faced, stammering and choking with fury, Wildringham was on his feet once more, Gene picked up the hat and stick he had insisted on retaining despite an agitated manservant.

"I'm at the Berkeley till Wednesday night," he

said easily. " Good evening. And went deliberately from the room, to call at Brown Shipley's, where he found an American letter awaiting him which he apparently found very satisfying, for, as he read it, something of the habitual hardness died out of his face, and peace, so long a stranger, came in its stead.

ON the Wednesday, late in the evening, he went back to Donnisthorpe Castle and there announced his intention to his brother of fixing his marriage for early November and returning with Phyllis to America in the early spring after two or three months' travelling in Italy and France. And on Thursday afternoon, his only perplexity now the position in which Cathleen was placed, he rode over to Little Standingrydge, gave his horse to a groom, and walked round to the front of the house. All the morning the heat had increased, till now it was stifling and, under a sky of dull whitish-blue and a grilling sun, the earth seemed to wither and scorch. The place was all very silent; even the birds were quiet in the leafy depths of the great trees, and Gene stood for a moment or two looking to see if anyone was about before returning to the hall door and announcing his presence.

There were some garden chairs under the big lime-tree, near them a camera and a toy engine lay on the grass; farther away, almost out of sight, a stooping gardener was doing something to a rose, and Marshal Foch, large, black, incredibly silky, strolled into view and surveyed him with dignified curiosity.

Gene was fond of cats, and he proceeded to cajole her till she drew near in the deliberate manner of her tribe and allowed him to rub her ears. Then, finding on better acquaintance that she approved of him,

rose and began to walk round and round his legs, bushy tail erect, purring loudly.

A boy, carrying a garden-basket, strolled whistling from the direction of the stable-yard towards the stooping gardener, and a maid appeared at one of the upper windows to lower a sun-blind; and Gene, stepping carefully over the cat, disengaged himself from her blandishments and strolled round the corner of the house.

There, on a distant court, he could see four people playing tennis and recognised Cathleen in a flame-hued frock. What an amazing creature the girl was in her daring and courage! He could appreciate courage, and hers seemed to him of a fine order, tied as she was to a selfish brute like Wildringham who refused to acknowledge the marriage. . . . Odd how defenceless love made a woman if the man she loved happened to be heartless. . . . Cathleen was the last girl he would have thought to be bullied by any man, yet here she was facing an appalling risk because her husband did not choose to protect her. The memory of that one good blow, the sensation of his clenched fist on Wildringham's too well-covered jaw, was very pleasing. Gene smiled a little amused smile as he sauntered across the scorched turf towards the tennis court. He could see now that the other players were Phyllis, and Pamela and Gerry from Wrexford, and he was just in time to catch a smiling nod and wave from Phyllis before her next service.

He stood smoking and watching them and occasionally talking a little to Judy, who was seated in a chair close by, scoring; while Angela and Ronnie at a big swing a little way off were indulging in that appalling pastime of "spinning"—in which the victim in the swing is wound as tightly as the ropes will go, then let loose and allowed to fly round clinging on for dear

life and ending with a soul-rending jerk which winds him up again the other way. Every child knows it, and Angela and Ronnie, crimson and sticky with heat, were thoroughly enjoying themselves, regardless of Judy who had begun to disdain such pastimes.

"Aren't they extraordinary!" she said to Gene, indicating the two by a jerk of one slim shoulder. "They'll be sick presently, I should think. You know I'm rather glad I'm going to school in a fortnight. I'm getting rather too old for the children and not old enough for Cathleen. Ooh! Isn't it hot!"

"Last game!" Pamela called, but the last game proved long-drawn-out, and Gene, glancing presently from players to sky, noticed that the heat, which seemed to be increasing, no longer came from the direct rays of the sun, but through a yellowish-grey haze which was creeping upward from the south-east. Idly curious, knowing the desperate need of rain, he strolled back to the higher ground near the house, where a widely uninterrupted view of the heavens could be obtained.

To the south-west the sky was still radiantly clear, but the haze was already overhead, and to the south and south-east the haze had thickened into definite clouds lying heavily, fold upon fold, along the heavens; while farther to the north huge cumulus heads, their sharp edges tinged with a coppery red light, were banking steadily up.

Far down on the horizon, sea met sky in a line of inky blackness below a broad belt of cloud so dark as to be almost alarming, and even as Gene watched, he saw, so far off that it was yet miles away, a twisting ribbon of lightning leap from heaven to oily ocean. After the unprecedented heat it was evident that a tremendous storm was gathering, and, loving any wild manifestation of nature, he felt a thrill of exaltation as he stood watching the dark horizon.

Once, following a wicked, twisting flash, he heard a mutter of thunder, so far off as to be more vibration than sound, and, almost at the same moment, a yell of triumph in Gerry's voice proclaimed the end of the tennis match.

A second or two later the players came from behind the row of lime-trees, and seeing the gathering storm, stopped short with one accord.

"My aunt! It's going to be a corker!" was Gerry's remark, and Phyllis, slipping her arm through Gene's, sighed with relief.

"Rain at last! How lovely!" And then anxiety awoke.

"Hugh is driving Joyce over to Palm Green," she said. "He took the dog-cart instead of the car. I hope they'll arrive first."

"They started nearly an hour ago," Cathleen reminded her. "There's the thunder!"

A low, long roll of thunder far off, but quite unmistakable, came to their ears, and a flash of lightning suddenly lit up the gardens about them.

It was still fairly clear overhead, and they all started, and Judy, who had joined them, ran to the corner of the house and cried out:

"It's like ink in the north! There must be a second storm!"

One look was enough for Phyllis, who started across the lawn at a run to rescue books, cushions, and camera. The others followed her, but Gene caught Cathleen's arm.

"You've run about enough. I'll get them," he said, and cursed himself for a fool the instant the words were past his lips, for Cathleen started as though he had struck her, staring at him with dilated eyes, the colour draining out of her face even to her lips. He waited for no explanations, however, but went swiftly across



to the others. An eddy of cool wind spun across the gardens and roared in the tree-tops; then all was silence once more—silence and stillness so intense as to be felt. By one accord everyone waited outside the drawing-room windows watching the approaching storm, while maids hurried about the upper floors winding up sunblinds and closing windows in hasty preparation.

A vivid streak of bluish-violet lightning ribboned the far-off cloud bank above the sea, and, instantaneous as the flash was, all the watchers saw clearly the branches that leapt on either side like the branches of a tree stripped bare, and even as it passed other sparks far to the east leapt earthwards in vicious stabs of light.

A curious immobility lay over the gardens and surrounding country; no quiver stirred the leafy towers of the beech and chestnut trees; no breath of air moved the scented lime-blossom, or stirred a flower in the great herbaceous borders. The cedar-branches lay in heavy layers against the sky as if their foliage was cast in bronze, and over the wide view of field and woodland a deep shadow was creeping, a menace of gloom and disaster. The birds too, usually so noisy, were absolutely silent; in the distant fields the cows had sought the dangerous shelter of the trees, and upon the whole country-side a great silence had descended as if all nature waited breathlessly for the moment when the fury of the advancing tempest should let loose. Still no rain fell, though now the storm was sweeping onward at a frightful pace, and Gene drew Phyllis towards the house.

“Better get in,” he said and they had hardly stepped over the sill before the whole room and landscape without was lit up by an appalling flash that blinded the eyes and sent even Gerry staggering from the open

window with his hands across his eyes as the thunder crashed in answer, as though the very world was falling in ruins.

Volleying and rolling the gongs of thunder echoed and re-echoed through the skies, and, as at last it died away, Phyllis gave a little cry and started forward as Cathleen slid out of her chair into a crumpled heap upon the floor. It was Gene who lifted her as easily as though she were a child and carried her, rather to Phyllis's surprise, all the way upstairs to her room, laying her on the couch there, fetching brandy, and then standing by as Phyllis sponged her forehead with cold water. He wanted to tell her what was the cause of this prolonged fainting-fit, but the secret was not his, and he stood by frowning a little, and as soon as Cathleen showed signs of reviving touched Phyllis on the arm.

"I shall be just outside if you want me, dearest," he said, and went out of the room, leaving Phyllis to kneel at her sister's side.

As for Cathleen she opened her eyes, looked about, felt the water dripping about hair and temples, and frowned.

"Did I faint?" she asked in weak disgust. "How idiotic!"

"Yes, dear. Lie still for a little. Shall I close the blinds, or doesn't the storm disturb you?"

A terrific crash of thunder interrupted the reply. Then Cathleen shrugged her shoulders.

"I don't mind it. Well—since I fainted, you'd better know the reason." And, turning, she raised herself on the cushions, her head swimming dizzily, and looked at her sister.

"You remember my tirade the other day?" she questioned. "I said the elemental fact of life had got me. Well, it has. Ten months ago Paul Wildrington and I were married, and I was with him in London

when you thought I was with Denise Harcourt. Now perhaps you can guess ! ”

She dropped back, eyes hard, lips smiling, defying Phyllis to sympathise, and Phyllis, leaning a little back, knelt there immovable, dismayed into silence. It was Cathleen who spoke first, and her tone was impatient.

“ Well—what are you going to say ? ”

Slowly Phyllis rose to her feet and, going across to a chair, sat down in it ; she felt suddenly rather sick, and the storm seemed to have retreated an immeasurable distance. It was not till the first great raindrops were hissing down on the hot stones that she spoke ; and then it was a question she had not meant to ask.

“ Do you love him ? ”

It was incredible to her, thinking of Wildringham, and, as she asked the question, she saw the answer in her sister's face and, without waiting for other reply, said quickly : “ Why have you kept it a secret ? ”

Cathleen sat up, cautiously lowered her feet to the floor, and rubbed her wet hair.

“ We thought it was rather amusing at first. Paul has odd ideas, and we both knew that Hugh would disapprove. He hates him, I know. And now—well, Paul is rather annoyed that this has happened to me. I suppose I could have kept quiet a few weeks longer, but that's all.”

“ When ? ” Phyllis asked, making no comment on the rest of the speech, and was startled by the laconic :

“ End of December as near as I can judge.”

“ Have you seen a doctor ? ”

“ I saw one in London. He says I'm quite fit.”

“ You mustn't play tennis, or dance any more.”

“ No, I suppose not.”

Commonplace question, answer, and remark ; and suddenly forcing herself to realise the situation, Phyllis came beside her on the couch.

"We'll have to tell Hugh at once," she said. "And it must be announced. Don't you see what will be thought if the date of the marriage is not made known? Wildringham ought never to have permitted it. . . . Where is he now?"

"In Scotland, I think," Cathleen said, rather limply. To her surprise she felt curiously unready to fight Paul's battles. She was even relieved at Phyllis's attitude of common-sense reasoning.

"It must be tea-time," she said. "Go down and have it. . . . I shall come in a minute or two. Yes, I'm quite all right now. It was playing tennis so vigorously, and the thunder startled me. Heavens! What rain!"

The rain indeed was a veritable deluge, pouring down in straight rods of water that was lit up again and again by the lightning that hardly ceased for a second, and even as she spoke Cathleen got up, and, walking over to the dressing-table, began repairing the ravages of ice-cold water on hair and frock.

For the second time in the last days Phyllis felt that she was being dismissed from her sister's room, but this time she did not go so indifferently, for she stopped by Cathleen's side and, for the first time for years, put her arms round her and kissed her cold cheeks.

Just for a second Cathleen stood rigid and silent, then with a quick movement she turned round, caught her sister and held her for a moment in close embrace, met her lips in a long kiss. Then, as suddenly, released her and turned back to the glass, leaving Phyllis to go from the room greatly comforted.

PAUL WILDRINGHAM, his last book of poems lying on a small table close at hand, was dressing for dinner in no very amiable frame of mind. To begin with, he was late and hungry ; then the cover to his book was not exactly to his design and he was furious in consequence ; and, thirdly, he had had an exceedingly unpleasant interview with Hugh Chalmington. The latter had telephoned the previous night when the great storm was at its height, had made an appointment, and had spent most of the afternoon in the flat, with the result that he found himself faced with the prospect of immediately finding a suitable home for his wife and publishing widely the date of their marriage. He had listened to some forcible home-truths and an unflattering estimate of his character, and he chose to place the responsibility of the whole thing at the door of Gene Hugon.

Gene's visit, his insulting questions, and still more insulting behaviour rankled like a poisoned arrow, and Wildringham was a man who dwelt on his grievances in no uncertain manner. To do him justice he had had no intention of submitting calmly to Gene's attack, but it had been so deliberate and yet so unexpected that he had been too taken aback to retort. Hugh Chalmington's visit taking place only a few days later seemed to him as the result, and he had not yet seen Cathleen to learn how the truth had leaked out. The desire to repay the injury had been steadily growing for the past week, but he was not as yet decided as to its form. Gene had

administered a deadly insult and he should pay to the last farthing ; and, although he did not know it, Fate was ready to take a hand in the payment.

Hugh Chalmington's attitude in the matter of Wildringham's marriage would necessitate his giving up this very comfortable bachelor flat and assuming the responsibilities of a married man—a state which he abhorred.

Picking up the book of poems, beautifully bound and printed, he scowled at the cover, glanced through the pages, then, coming across a stanza that took his fancy, stood to read it, a faint smile of satisfaction dawning upon his face. How full of music and colour it was, this poem that he had written during those first days of love for Cathleen!—likening her queer, pale beauty to Egypt's mysteries and Isis worship, her red lips to the blood that was shed in a thousand orgies of passion and cruelty. . . . The telephone bell roused him with a painful jerk, and his man came in with a message.

“ Would Mr. Wildringham dine at eight-fifteen with Mr. and Mrs. Knox Macann at the Basque ? ”

He hesitated, looked at his watch, said he would, and put the book away to finish dressing, mix himself a cocktail, and walk from his Half-Moon Street flat to the famous little Dover Street restaurant. He found the Macanns there. Knox Macann, a big, fleshy man in the early fifties, his wife, some twenty years younger, very thin and extremely smart with that air of hard worldliness that seems to clothe some personalities like armour.

“ I'm so sorry we have no one to meet you,” she said as they sat down to dinner. “ Knox's niece was coming—a really charming girl, but she's ill—influenza, I think—and telephoned at the last minute.”

Wildringham was not sorry, however ; he hated most



girls, being incredibly bored by them, and liked his hostess, which meant that she appreciated himself. Over fish, as they discussed what theatre they should go to, Knox Macann asked if he had been really occupied all the afternoon.

"I wanted to get you and they told me you weren't to be disturbed," he complained. "I told your man good and plenty what I thought of him, but it was no good."

"He was quite right," Wildringham said. "But I'm sorry you happened to be the victim. I had an interview—on very important personal business—and I had given strict orders that no one was to be put through." And, as Macann went on talking, Wildringham made a sudden decision. The fact of his marriage would have to be public property very soon, as would his change of residence and general habits; thanks to Hugh Chalmington he would be forced to pose at least as a normal man, and this seemed to him as good an opportunity as any other to announce the affair. Quite heedless of what Macann had been saying, he broke into the middle of one of his sentences, and in a few brief words announced his marriage to Cathleen Chalmington.

He could see the incredulous amazement his information had caused, and it was evident that neither of his hearers knew quite what to say. Woman-like Mrs. Macann recovered herself first, with a certain delicately malicious raillery.

"I must say you have surprised us, Paul. I'd no idea you contemplated giving up bachelorhood. I thought you were too modern to permit such obsolete forms to fetter you. However, we wish you every happiness, don't we, Knox?"

"Sure thing," Knox, thus appealed to, replied. "Didn't we meet your wife at that house Daltry took us to? Little—something Manor?"

" Little Standingrydge—yes. That is her home."

" Of course I remember. There was another daughter—Phyllis—very fair. Seem to remember reading something about her somewhere lately."

" Her photograph was in *Eve*," his wife reminded him. " It was the announcement of her engagement. Who to, Paul ? "

" Fellow named Gene Hugon, Lord Donnisthorpe's brother," Wildringham said sulkily. " Been all his life out in the wild West and behaves like it."

" That the fella you said cut your dance ? " Knox demanded of his wife. " Like to tell him what I think of his manners."

" He wouldn't care if you did," Wildringham retorted. " I've a score myself to settle with Gene Hugon when the time comes."

They talked for a while, with the result that, two days later, Edith Macann, glancing through an illustrated weekly as her maid was doing her hair for dinner, came across a photograph of a group of some house-party in Scotland and called to her husband. He came out of his dressing-room, none too willingly, said : " What in Hades do you want me for ? " and took the paper at her brief :

" There's Phyllis Chalmington and the man, Hugon, she's engaged to."

For a moment he did not answer, but, taking the paper close to a light, scanned the photograph and then turned to his wife.

" You're dead sure this is the fella ? "

" Dead sure," she repeated. " Why, Knox ? What are you looking like that for ? "

" Only that if he isn't the same man as the road-agent that held up my machine on the road to Sand River I'll eat my hat. Paul said he'd been West. Wait a minute."

He disappeared into his room, and, after a little, came back with an old pocket-book in his hand, from which he extracted a torn scrap of newspaper.

"Look at that," he said, handing it across to his wife, "and tell me if that's not the same face."

She took it and saw that it was a photograph of Gene Hugon indeed, in rough Western clothes, and underneath the words in big letters :

" 'Black Ramsden,' who is the champion bad boy of the West. Five thousand dollars reward," and below this announcement, a few lines :

"Black Ramsden is the daring leader of a gang of road-agents who for the past eighteen months have been holding up not only travellers——"

The paper was torn there and she could read no more, but it was with eyes that sparkled in the liveliest curiosity that she handed the scrap back to her husband.

"I believe you are right, Knox ! And Paul hates him. I think we'll show that to Paul."

Knox looked at her curiously ; he realised that some motive of which he knew nothing was working swiftly in his wife's brain, but even he had no faintest suspicion of her passionate devotion to Paul Wildringham and the loyalty that made his enemies hers—an odd quality in a woman of her hardly-selfish temperament.

So it came about that late that evening, being alone in their hotel sitting-room, she rang up Wildringham, and asked him to come round, which, a little surprised at so urgent a summons, he did.

As he entered the room she was standing under a lamp studying something she held in her hand, and, at his appearance, without one word of greeting she held out to him a folded cutting from a newspaper.

"Look at that, Paul," she said. "Do you recognise the portrait ? "

Perplexed, he took it from her hand, looked a question at her, then looked at the paper, started, looked again, then gave an exclamation of sheer dumbfounded amazement, at which she smiled, an odd little smile.

"Yes," she said. "I thought you would. Interesting, isn't it? Somehow I had an idea it might be useful to you."

"Useful?" he echoed, looking at her, "useful? Yes, it will be very useful. Quite how much you do not know. But, how did you get this? How did you guess?"

"It isn't mine," she said, watching him. "It belongs to Knox. He was held up once by this man, three years ago and more, and robbed on the Santa Fé trail. He's never forgotten it, and when the local papers published this portrait he cut it out saying that one day he might find a use for it. He saw a portrait of Gene Hugon in a group in some weekly paper and recognised him as the same man as this."

"Where's your husband now?" Wildringham asked. "Can I keep this?"

"Dining with a man at St. James's Palace—someone on guard asked them. "Yes, but be certain not to lose it."

"I won't lose it," Wildringham said grimly, and then, becoming aware that she was looking at him intently, realised his want of suitable gratitude. Going closer he took her hands.

"How wonderful of you to think of me!" he said impressively. "But you are always so different to any other woman! Why, I wonder?"

It was only a kiss, simulated passion on his side, real on hers, and, all the while, his brain was scheming and the over-pampered physical self was detesting and despising this woman who so absurdly showed her adoration—he had no use for caresses.

The lateness of the hour gave him the excuse to get away, and directly he got outside the hotel he went to his club in case Cathleen should ring him up at the flat after her interview with her father, and there sat in a remote corner pretending to read and in reality working out a scheme of revenge. But Fate had not quite finished her favours towards him, for when he got back to Half-Moon Street, after eleven, his man gave him a message from Knox Macann asking him to ring up early in the morning as there was news for him—which he did, and heard Macann's harsh Western drawl come over the wire.

"Seems to me I heard you and my wife talking about this fella, Hugon, going to marry Miss Chalmington. Well, he can't. He's married."

"What?" Wildringham cried, for once startled out of any pretence of superiority. "Rubbish! It's impossible!"

"Now, look here, young man," came the voice again, "go easy on your impossibles. Marrying's mighty easy some places, and I tell you this hick is married right enough. I know the priest who fixed it, eight years ago—Mexican Jesuit. Oh, it's right enough, and the girl was an East-sider gone out to the dancing-hall to the one-horse town he was playing round at. Now, if you want details I can give 'em to you right now, and it seems to me you've a down on this Hugon, and I sure have, so you can act for both. Come to the hotel, or anywhere else, and we'll have a talk."

"Come to me if you can," Wildringham said hoarsely. "I've got to stay in because my lawyers are coming round."

"All right. I'll be there," and, ringing off, he enabled Wildringham to drop back in his chair incredulous, triumphant, for once feverishly excited. If this were indeed so, surely Hugon would not dare to run the

chance of bigamy, yet he, Wildringham, was bound to admit that there were not many things Hugon would not dare to do, and perhaps the remoteness of the place, the humble position of the girl, and the general circumstances of those past years, had made him feel quite secure in an unmolested future. Well, he had chosen to interfere, he had struck a blow that had not yet been avenged, and here, to the hand, was a weapon with which to strike at the very foundations of his life—for that Hugon loved Phyllis Chalmington was patent, even to such a man as Wildringham.

So he thought, weaving a network of plans that resulted hours later in two long cables, one to New York and one to Chicago, and a sitting into the early hours of the morning at his writing-table making arrangements for an unexpected flying trip to the United States.



IT was November, and the windows of the big drawing-room and Phyllis's bedroom above it were curtains of rippling gold where the beech and chestnut trees shed their leaves or fluttered them in the gentle western breezes . . . a wonderful November with clear blue skies above a world aflame with the crimson and gold of wood and copse and hedgerow. Days warm as summer, with a hint of frost to sharpen nights and mornings and bring out the stars in the cloudless sky ; days to remember, quiet, windless, dreaming ; days when Phyllis, radiantly happy with that deep intensity that made her so wonderful to the man who loved her, lived every jewelled moment in fullness of joy. Yet at Little Standingrydge there were still shadows ; Cathleen, paler than ever, painfully thin, faced her world with her old gallant defiance, and Maurice, just home from Scotland, looked almost as ill. He had said very little to Phyllis on the matter of her engagement ; she knew he did not approve, but neither for that matter did Hugh or Leon, or in fact anyone unless it were her uncle Hilary, who all along had welcomed Gene with a warmth and sincerity that was peculiarly charming. And Joyce was anything but well and Hugh was growing anxious, for the doctors were not satisfied, though Joyce herself, sweetly reasonable as ever, pooh-poohed their anxieties and lived her life very much as usual.

As for Wildringham, he had been two months in America and was expected home in three days' time, and Phyllis longed to go to Cathleen and beg her to tell Hugh how she dreaded that home-coming. But Cathleen gave no opportunity for counsel or sympathy, and curiously enough the only person whose company she ever sought was her stepmother, whose coming she had so bitterly resented. Whether it was the similarity in their positions, or the sense of detachment that Joyce had carefully cultivated with regard to her stepdaughter's marriage, was impossible to tell; it remained that Cathleen spent a good deal of time with her, and that Joyce had more of her confidence than any other being.

At the very end of the month the still golden weather came to an end in gathering clouds and rising wind, and Joyce, who all day had stayed in her room, sent a message to Phyllis to ask her to come in on her way down to dinner. Phyllis, who had been out cubbing that day, was expecting Gene, who had been to town to dinner, and, knowing that Wildringham's boat had arrived the day before and that he would certainly be down the next day, was divided in her joy at seeing her lover again and sympathetic anxiety for Cathleen, whom, she was certain, shrank from meeting her husband.

She dressed early, hearing as she did so the beat of rain against the window, and went along the corridor to her stepmother, to find Joyce in a big arm-chair near the leaping wood-fire.

The Tower room was very spacious, and, despite the thick walls, the rising storm was very audible, and the sleet driving against the windows in the Tower recess and the big square one opposite the beds was like a fierce tattoo on the panes.

"You wanted me, dear?" Phyllis said, closing the

door and coming swiftly across. Then, as she saw her stepmother's face :

"Joyce ! You're ill ! "

Joyce, very pale and rather drawn, looked up with a warning gesture.

"Hush ! Hugh's in the dressing-room ! I do feel rather—odd. Phyllis, dear . . . don't let him know . . . unless you can help it, but get Dr. Ryle over. If he finds out, say I've got a chill . . . it may be just that. I don't want anyone else to give the message. Can you do this ? Ask him to come over soon."

"Why, of course I will," Phyllis said, laying her hand on her stepmother's. "But, Joyce dear—you are not afraid it's—the other ? "

"I'm not sure," Joyce said in a whisper. "I hope not. I got cold to-day driving, so probably it's only that."

"You ought to be in bed," Phyllis said quickly. "Where's Marie ? Let me call her."

But Joyce stopped her.

"No. Not yet. When Hugh has gone down. He's so tired fighting that right-of-way business with that wretched old Abraham I want him to have his dinner first. It's very likely nothing else, dear. Don't look so anxious."

"I'll go and telephone now," Phyllis answered. "And I'll come up directly we're out of the dining-room. Promise me, dear, you'll send to me if you feel worse. Promise ! "

"Of course ! " Joyce said, smiling up at her. "What a dear you are, Phyllis ! I don't wonder at Gene ! "

Phyllis laughed, bent and kissed her, and then hurried away to the telephone and called up the doctor, who lived in the village two miles away. He was rather worried at her words and promised to come directly he got rid of the patient he then had, and,

relieved, Phyllis went into the library to wait for Gene, whom she knew would be over early.

As it happened, Judy, home a fortnight early for the Christmas holidays, owing to an outbreak of measles in the school, was allowed to dine downstairs when no visitors were present, and on this particular evening, having changed into her white dinner frock, betook herself with a book to the alcove by the big wood fire in the hall, and curled up there, quite out of sight, for fifteen minutes' reading of a certain novel which if not forbidden was at least not approved of by Authority. Miles away and fathoms deep, she was only half-roused by the sound of voices, and went on reading hardly realising that she was also listening to a conversation not meant for her to hear till Maurice's voice jerked her back to unwilling consciousness.

"Phyllis is waiting for you in the library. Did you have a good time in town?"

Gene's slow cool tones answered, and there was a note in them that aroused Judy to sudden odd fear.

"A damned bad one. Your score is mounting, Maurice. Have you ever considered the possibility that one day I might ask you to pay it?"

There was a long silence, and Judy, hoping they had gone, was about to move when her brother's answer checked her.

"I have thought of little else for ten years. . . ."

"Yet you never have paid!" Gene mocked, and Maurice made a sudden movement of despair.

"Not in the way you mean—if that would do any good——"

"Not now," Gene said, with sudden harshness. "I swore you to silence then, and I keep you to it. Phyllis, thank God for her, believes in me and I don't care for any other living soul—except your father."

Another moment's silence, then Maurice spoke again.

"Gene—for God's sake let me tell the truth! I can't go on like this . . . it's hell . . . and it only blackens you. Let them know the truth. . . ."

"Who would believe you? I lied for your father's sake, not for yours . . . for all he had done for me . . . the love he gave me. . . . Do you think I'd see him hurt any more now than then, just to save your miserable conscience? You were a coward then and you are a coward now—and, if ever you try to speak, I'll put a bullet in you first and myself next. Bite on that!"

Judy, wide-eyed, horrified, sat upright on her chair, half-guessing the truth, knowing something, but not all of the story, heard Gene go away across the hall and down the long passage to the library, wondered if Maurice were still there, and heard, close by her, an anguished groan. The next moment the groan was a sob, and, creeping out, she saw her brother drop into one of the big high-winged arm-chairs, his face hidden. At any moment someone might come downstairs, and, with a sudden upwelling of maternal tenderness, she went swiftly across to him and laid her hand on his arm, trembling yet determined. He started violently at her touch, lifting a white, strained face, and Judy felt rather than saw at what a crisis of emotion he was.

"Maurice—I heard Gene—I was reading. What's the matter?"

With an effort Maurice pulled himself together.

"Nothing you can help, Judy dear. Don't look so worried. Run away." And Judy felt obliged to go.

Meanwhile in the library Phyllis and Gene greeted each other, and Phyllis, her hands on his shoulders, scanned the beloved face with anxious intentness.

"Gene, you look—different," she said a little

anxiously. "If you were anyone else I should say you looked ill. What is it, dear?"

"Nothing—at least nothing that can be helped," he said a little hoarsely. "I hate being away from you, dear. I am afraid. I wonder if you will love me when I get back. I wonder if you are safe, or if Fate will step in and punish me by taking you from me. Phyllis"—his tone deepened, his hands gripped her till they hurt—"if you ever turned from me, it would be the end of everything—everything."

"Oh, my dear," she said, exquisitely tender over him, "you mustn't talk like that. You must not think of these things. And **don't** doubt me, dear. It's not fair. It hurts me. I've given you no cause."

"I know," he said remorsefully. "Only I find it so hard to believe—and—and I am afraid. I think I always shall be."

"But you've told me everything," she said, disturbed a little by the strained misery of his eyes. "Dear, what is it? Is there something else?"

For one long moment he hesitated, torn with conflicting emotions. If he dared to tell her the one shameful thing he had kept back . . . if he dared . . . yet why? Why hurt her so when it was over, done with, buried in a New Mexican grave four years since? Had not that letter from the New York detectives he had employed told him Alma was dead . . . and then, being beyond all things a man of cool daring, he knew he must tell her.

"Dearest . . . dearest . . . there is something. It's over, years since . . . but I must have you quite alone. To-night—after dinner——"

She had only time to kiss him as her answer before Hugh entered, followed by the announcement of dinner, and, once in the dining-room, she tried to put any worries of her own **aside**, and, wondering how Joyce



felt and if Doctor Ryle would soon arrive, exerted herself nevertheless to talk and keep Hugh from too great an anxiety. When she and Cathleen left the dining-room she ran upstairs to the Tower room, knocked and entered, to find her stepmother in bed and the brown-bearded, kindly doctor standing at the bed's foot, studying her with keen blue eyes. He looked up in some relief as Phyllis entered, for he had known her all her life and relied on her good sense.

"Mrs. Chalmington is not well," he said, greetings over. "But if she will stay quietly in bed I don't think there's much cause for anxiety. Still, just as a precaution I've telephoned to town for a nurse, and she will come down on the last train. Gets in 11.25. You can have her met?"

"Of course, Dr. Ryle. And—can't I do something meanwhile?"

"No—no, I think not. What I should like would be your old nurse to sit with Mrs. Chalmington while I beg a little food, as I've had no time for anything since lunch."

"Why, of course! I'll fetch her!" And glad to be of any use, Phyllis hurried away. She was quite shrewd enough to read between the lines, and she knew that Dr. Ryle was more anxious than he would admit, and when Nannie was safely established in the Tower room she went downstairs to tell Hugh that the doctor had called just to see how Joyce was.

Luckily Hugh believed it, and she was able to leave them together while the doctor ate a hasty meal, then he made an excuse to go upstairs once more. Phyllis ordered the car to meet the last train, and after Hugh had come downstairs from seeing Joyce, they went into the drawing-room, where a bridge four was made up and the others not playing sat and talked.

It was just a quarter-past nine when, in a lull in the sleet and wind, a car throbbed past, and Hugh glanced up from his hand in surprise.

"Who on earth can that be at this time of night?" he exclaimed. "Judy—go and see," and resumed the game, while Phyllis, oddly uneasy, acted on sheer instinct and moved over to Gene. The next moment the door opened, a worried parlour-maid announced: "Mr. Wildringham and Mrs. Ramsden," and Paul came in, and with him a woman—or a girl—short, fair, with rouged cheeks, a coarse painted mouth, and great blue eyes beneath darkened lashes. A girl dressed in cheaply smart American store clothes, the rain glistening on her little hat and fair hair. And at sight of her Phyllis heard Gene utter a stifled exclamation, and, turning to look at him, saw his face ashen, his eyes terrible, and knew that here was something she did not know, that here was the reason of that strangeness before dinner. Subconsciously she knew that in a moment the blow would fall, yet outwardly, after that one quick look and movement, she was quite quiet; only the bridge-players laid down their hands, and Hugh rose, for Wildringham was speaking again.

"Mrs. Ramsden, or as she may prefer to be called, Mrs. Gene Hugon."

Phyllis felt, though she did not actually hear, the sounds about her till Hugh's voice pierced the veil that seemed to enwrap her.

"Gene—what is the meaning of this?"

The girl answered before Gene, standing rigid as a statue, could speak.

"Yep. Ask him," she said, speaking in a loud voice. "It looks good to me, this little hovel he settled down in. Kinder smart. I gotta get him to give me one like it!"

"Please be quiet a moment," Hugh said kindly, yet quite determinedly. "I wish to speak to Mr. Hugon. Wildringham, be good enough to get this lady a chair."

"Say, bo, what's the joke on me?" 'this lady' inquired, staring round. "Hullo! there's Gene. Here, there ain't no use you asking questions of Gene, mister. He's mine."

Phyllis shivered a little at the last two words, and then, very still and upright, stood watching the scene as if she were an entirely disinterested spectator. She saw, yet did not see, Cathleen's look of loathing horror at Wildringham, but she was only really conscious of two things—Gene's silence, and the cold that was creeping over her. A deathly, still cold that seemed to press up against her.

Hugh's voice broke the silence.

"Gene . . . can you explain this affair? What is this lady to you?"

"Wife, you bet!"

The East-side accent cut the air like a jagged knife.

"This kid's not havin' any jujube stuff handed out to her. No, *sir*. He married me at Grant's Ford, New Mexico, July 4th, 1912."

Sudden anger at Gene's silence seized Phyllis; the cold grip on limbs and heart seemed to relax, and, wheeling round, she caught Gene's arm.

"Gene! Gene!" she cried, "why don't you speak? Why don't you tell them it's all an absurd mistake?"

"Say, you!" the girl broke in, taking a step towards them, "not so darn friendly if *you* please! Oh!"—sudden rage flared into her face and voice—"he's that all right! I should worry!"

Ignoring her as completely as though she were non-existent, Phyllis shook Gene with clenched, gripping fingers.

"Gene! Gene! Don't you hear? Why don't you speak? Why don't you tell them it's a lie?"

As if her touch and voice recalled his spirit from some vast distance, Gene looked down at her, for the first time taking his gaze from the yellow-haired girl who stood in the centre of the room, and, as he did so, he spoke slowly, as if with great difficulty in articulation.

"Because it isn't a lie," he said, with that queer, dragging voice. "It's true."

"True?" Phyllis echoed the word hardly above her breath, eyes dilating, fingers loosening their desperate grip. "True? I don't understand!"

"It's true," he said again, "I married her. But I heard she was dead. I heard she died four years ago."

With a queer little sound, almost of triumph, Phyllis took a swift step nearer him, and her fingers on his arm slipped to his hand and held it.

"You hear that?" she cried, turning on the girl, who watched them with eyes that sparkled greedily. "If you are his wife, why did you let him think you were dead? Why did you leave him all these years?"

"You get in on the ground floor, don't you?" was her answer. "I didn't leave him; he left me. Walked out and left little Dottie to look after herself. And I only heard he was alive six months ago."

Once more Hugh spoke.

"Is this true, Gene?"

And Gene answered dully:

"Yes, it's true. I was half-drunk when I married her."

"Did you tell Phyllis?"

"No. I tried to." Suddenly desperate he swung round, catching her wrist. "I tried to. I was going to tell you to-night—and I heard she was dead—four years ago——"

"When did you hear that?"

At the stern question Gene looked across at Hugh once more, and into his grey, strained face came a look of hunted desperation.

"Before I asked your daughter to marry me—and after I told her I loved her."

Laughter cut him short, the vulgar, noisy laughter of the yellow-haired girl, who watched with the bright-eyed curiosity of an animal.

"You mutt! You crazy mutt! Did you think you'd jump my trail's easy as that? Gosh, boy! you're some hick, ain't you, goin' round marrying anywheres you choose!"

And then, as if suddenly realising what her position was, followed a flood of abuse only checked by the violent opening of the door and the sight of Joyce's maid, white and shaking:

"Miss—Phyllis—oh, sir—Mrs. Chalmington—the doctor——"

Her cry of agitation cut through the storm of words, and at it, Phyllis let go Gene's arm, pushed aside the yellow-haired girl with as little ceremony as though she were a piece of furniture, and ran across the hall and up the stairs. Sickened and half-stunned by the scene she had just passed through, the knowledge of Joyce's danger pulled her together as nothing else would, and, as she entered the Tower room, she was her own master, able for the time being to face any emergency.

During the next few hours of that wild night she needed both strength and courage, for the nurse arriving from town needed aid in the fight for Joyce's life that followed. Soon after midnight the baby was born, a tiny seven-months boy, who wailed feebly, yet determinedly, while his mother drew nearer and nearer to the shore of that dread sea which men call Death; and doctor and nurse fought their losing fight, and

Hugh, white-faced and silent, waited and watched, and Phyllis held the wailing, cottonwool-wrapped bundle that was his son.

The sleet had long since changed to snow, and the night was waning, yet in the Manor windows lights burned, in the rooms fires were kept up, and about two o'clock the Cadillac, coated with snow, came to a sliding halt at the hall door, and from it stepped a burly, grey-haired man, muffled in a huge overcoat and carrying a fateful, small black bag. Hugh, standing by the hall-fire, hollow-eyed and deadly pale, heard the sleepy maid open the door and hurried to him, and a minute or two later led the famous surgeon up to the Tower room, and, as he entered, met Phyllis leaving the dressing-room carrying very tenderly the white bundle that no longer cried.

"I'm taking him to Nannie; she's got a lovely fire in the nursery and they don't want him in there," she said. "Sit in my room, Hugh. It's warm there, too."

She hurried on, found Nannie waiting with olive oil and more cottonwool and every kind of necessity for the tiny scrap of humanity, heard that the children were luckily sleeping through the stir and anxiety in the house, and then started anxiously on seeing Cathleen, wrapped in a soft, white wool dressing-gown, enter the room.

"Cathleen—darling! You ought to be in bed!" she exclaimed, fresh anxiety seizing her at the thought of her sister's risk, but Cathleen shook her head and sank down into a low chair near the fire.

"I can't sleep, but I'm perfectly all right," she said, "I promise I won't do anything foolish, but I don't want to think."

Nannie, who had grown grey in the Chalmingtons' service, looked up from her absorbing task.

"There's the kettle boiling, Miss Cathleen," she said,



heedless of her nursling's new appellation, "and all the things ready in the cupboard. If you'd make some tea for Miss Phyllis perhaps the master—there, there, my pretty! That's better—perhaps the master would have some too."

As if glad of any occupation, Cathleen got up, and Phyllis, saying she would be back in a moment, ran downstairs, to be met at the foot of the stairs by the cook, who anxiously inquired after her mistress.

"I don't know, Mrs. Cutler—she's very, very ill—but you oughtn't to be up——"

"I just couldn't sleep, Miss Phyllis, when Polly"—Polly was the kitchen-maid—"came into my room at two o'clock and said the dear little baby was born—and I thought the doctors'd be wanting some food maybe. I'll go back to the kitchen and see if things is ready."

She departed after Phyllis had given her what information she could, and sent a housemaid back with sandwiches and coffee, which Phyllis ordered to be taken up to the nursery, while she herself hurried to the library. She found Maurice there and, with sudden fear, asked him what had happened.

"Wildringham took the damn' little bitch away—I beg your pardon, Phyllis. And Gene left almost at once—I suppose he'll be over again later. I told him I'd telephone about Joyce. How is she?"

"I don't know." It was an odd relief to think that Gene was for the moment away. Had he stayed she would have been asking to be with him, to assure him of her loyalty, her love, to hear the truth of the tragedy, to plan what must be done. As it was—— "I don't know," she said again. "She's very ill, but the surgeon is in there now and we shall know nothing yet. I can't wait. If you want food there's plenty ready in the dining-room."

She went upstairs again, found Hugh pacing up and down the long passage that led to the Tower room, forced him to have a drink and eat a sandwich, then made her way to the homely comfort of the nursery. At the end of a short passage on the way was a window, and, pulling aside the curtains, she looked out to see a white world and a grey mass of thick, whirling flakes against the window. The blizzard seemed to increase rather than decrease, and the night a fit one for the tragedies that were being enacted. In the nursery the tea was ready, fragrantly refreshing. Cathleen was resting, tucked up on the couch, and Nannie had finished her ministrations and the new wee brother was sleeping close to the fire, not in the lace-and-muslin-hung cot that had been prepared for him, but in an old bassinette that had been Leon's, where the heat could play about his wool wrappings.

"They have to be put in an incubator sometimes, don't they?" Cathleen asked as Phyllis, exhausted but relieved in mind, dropped into a chair and took her cup from Nannie's hand.

"Yes, sometimes, poor lambs. But he's wonderfully strong and bonny for a premature baby, bless him," Nanny said. "Another cup, Miss Phyllis dearie—ah—here's the master!"

Hugh, worn and haggard, still in his dress clothes, came in, looked at his sleeping son, stood for a moment holding his hands to the blaze and then went out again without a word, and this time Phyllis followed him. She did not speak, but she slipped her arm through his, and just as they reached the room the door opened and the surgeon, Sir John Crooks, and their own Doctor Ryle, came out, and a whiff of ether, pungent, nauseating, came with them.

Seeing Hugh, Sir John spoke in his grave, yet kindly, voice.

"She is still under the influence of the anæsthetic. . . . I believe she will pull through, for she has courage and a fine clean constitution. More, for the moment, I dare not say."

Hugh nodded. His voice, hoarse and rough, seemed strangled in his throat.

"Can I go in?"

"I should prefer not—yet. She will not know anyone and it would only distress you, but you shall be told the instant any change occurs."

Phyllis, catching Dr. Ryle's eye, spoke before Hugh could reply.

"Oughtn't you to have some food, Sir John?" she said. "And you too, Dr. Ryle? There is some ready in the dining-room, or I can have it sent up."

"Thank you, it would be an excellent thing. Come, Mr. Chalmington——"

"I don't want anything," Hugh said impatiently; but Sir John overruled him, and it resulted in the surgeon going down and Dr. Ryle waiting till he should return before leaving the patient.

For the first time during that dreadful night Phyllis was free to sit down and think over all that had occurred, but she found herself unable to grasp the true inwardness of the evening's events, and only able to dwell continuously on Joyce's condition. For the time being Gene and the dreadful girl who called herself his wife seemed to take on something of unreality, the hideous scene to retreat to some remote distance; it was impossible to consider Gene as Wildringham wished him to be considered, and, as the thought of Wildringham obtruded, the realisation of what Cathleen must be feeling came clearly home to her. It was Cathleen's husband who had done this thing, who had deliberately set out to wreck Gene's life, to ruin his future. Gene had said he believed his wife to be dead—

and if he said that it was true. Not once, for one instant, did Phyllis find herself doubting him. She loved him with the strength of her nature, and love with her meant complete trust. And, suddenly, a fear lest Gene should not understand this flashed into her mind. She had left him precipitately, had fled on hearing of Joyce's danger—what if he misunderstood? He had left the house without one word. . . . Was it possible that he feared to see her? Dreaded her judgment of him?

The thought drove all possibility of rest away, and, rising, she went to the window and looked out once more. It was still quite dark, for the wheezy grandfather in the upper hall had only just struck five, but the snow had ceased and the wind had fallen. Dropping the curtain once more, she wandered back across the room. There were still two hours before she could telephone to the Castle and speak to Gene, and, considering it was too late to hope for sleep, she went to her bathroom, took a hot bath, put on day clothes and went along to the Tower room once more just as Hugh came up the stairs.

At that moment the bedroom door opened and the nurse hurried out, saw Hugh, said quickly, yet quietly:

"The doctors would like you to come in, sir," and stood without as he went in, not even seeing her.

At seven, just as the first faint greyness of winter dawn was showing in the east, Joyce died.

THE afternoon of December 7th was the first day of even tolerable weather to most of the passengers on board the *Adriatic*. Ever since she had left Southampton the seas had done their best to prevent her arrival to time at New York, and for seven days the storm had raged and many passengers kept to their cabins ; but to-day the worst was over, and the knowledge that the Nantucket Light was past cheered even the most seasick.

The boat was rather full with Americans returning for Christmas and English going over on visits or business, and this afternoon the decks were full of promenading talking people, despite the cold wind that blew, for darkness would see Fire Island and an anchorage in the Narrows for the night.

Well away from the crowd on the top deck, where the view forward was uninterrupted, Gene paced up and down, watching the great expanse of tossing water, grey laced with white, and here and there agleam with gold, for in the west the clouds had broken, and through the rift pale winter sunshine touched the heaving ocean and lit up the great black wrack of storm-cloud in the steamer's wake.

That rift of blue was rapidly widening, and to many it was an omen of happiness that the great new country of the West should lie beneath that clearing heaven, but to Gene no such pleasing fancy came. He looked years older ; there was grey in the crisp

hair about his temples, and more lines about the grim mouth and eyes, and throughout the voyage he had paced the upper deck alone, only going below to sleep and eat—a solitary, forbidding figure inviting neither confidence nor companionship.

The wild seas, the roaring, buffeting gale had been in tune with his mood ; but now the brief respite was over and he would be forced to make some plan, to follow some course of action, and such was exactly what he dreaded. The short winter afternoon was already closing in, the sun very near the horizon, the sea going down almost momentarily as the boat got under shelter of the land, invisible as yet beyond that golden horizon. And Gene, ceasing his restless walk, stared back into the gloom and cloud of the east. There, nearly eight days' journey away, across two thousand miles of tossing water, was the woman he loved and would never see again, and he knew that if he lived a hundred years he would never forget her face or cease to hear her voice in his ears :

“ Gene ! Gene ! Why don't you speak ? Why don't you tell them it's all a lie ? ”

And he had tried to tell her : a dozen times that last confession had been on his lips, a dozen times he had sought for courage to reveal the one last disgraceful episode of his history, and always, up till that very last evening, he had failed. Reviewing his actions—the detective agency he had employed in New York when he first realised his love for Phyllis, their investigations ending in the report that Alma was dead, his sense of freedom and relief, and then—without warning the appearance of Wildrington and Alma herself, in all her dreadful vitality, triumphant at the scene she had herself created. And, at the thought of Wildrington, Gene's face darkened. He had realised instantly that by some manner of means Wildrington had discovered



the incident of that drunken marriage in the little New Mexican town years ago, and, knowing, had used it as his means of revenge. Well—he had won the first round of the fight and his winning had cost his enemy what was dearer than life itself; but the final victory was not yet, and Gene was not a man to forget. He could bide his time, but he had never yet failed to avenge an injury, and he could afford to wait. So much for Wildringham. As for Alma, he had given her money, which was all she wanted, seen his lawyer and settled a sum on her to be paid annually; taken her passage to New York by another boat and seen her as far as Cherbourg, where he had waited for his own out-going steamer; at least there should be no chance of her further annoying Phyllis.

All this voyage he had kept his thoughts as far as possible from the more dreadful side of the whole tragic business. The blank horror when Phyllis did not return from her stepmother's room, the agony of mind as he featured her feelings with regard to him—so pitifully far from actual fact had he but guessed it—his waiting alone in the deserted drawing-room after Cathleen's outburst of rage at her husband. Cathleen, whom he had always rather disliked for her cynical remarks and none too easy temper, had shown herself in a strangely new light. She had turned on Wildringham in a cold fury that found its expression in a biting indictment of both his character and behaviour.

Thick-skinned and insufferably conceited as he was, even he had winced at her summing up.

"I utterly refuse to live with you again as your wife," Gene seemed still to hear her voice. "As for my unfortunate baby, I intend to teach it that it has no father worthy the name. You are a coward, and, worse still, you are a fool and I have no use for fools once I know them as such. I don't know what this

girl is to you and I don't in the least mind. What I do mind, however, is her presence and yours in this house. Your car is still at the door. Please leave in it."

She had rung the bell and waited while they were shown out, and then, left alone with Gene, she had suddenly come across to him, put her hands and head against his breast and stood there trembling, saying over and over again :

"If I were a man I would have killed him ! I would have killed him ! Oh, Gene ! What am I to do !"

He had comforted her, his own wretchedness put for the moment aside, and she had gone up to her room, and he had waited . . . waited . . . listening for Phyllis's step . . . her voice . . . waited till, with awful significance, it dawned upon him that she had gone with no intention of returning. And then, little guessing the tragedy that was being enacted behind the drawn curtains of her stepmother's room, he had left the house, driving through the blizzard to Donnisthorpe, where he left word for his man to pack and follow ; packed a few necessaries, threw them into the car, and was off without anyone but a sleepy butler being aware of his visit. He remembered practically nothing of that drive to town ; he only knew that he got there just as London was struggling to wake up, that he went to Charing Cross Hotel, saw his lawyers and found out where Alma was staying, then left for Calais by the afternoon boat, taking her with him. He made his man keep her under his personal supervision, travelled along the weary line from Calais to Cherbourg, put her on board a slow-going American boat, and followed on the *Adriatic* himself the next day.

By his action in thus leaving the country he realised that he had utterly damned himself in the eyes of his world, but for that he cared nothing. Only two people's

opinion counted, and of those two only that of one could have changed his course of action—Hugh Chalmington and Phyllis ; and in the eyes of them both now he was beyond the pale. He realised too that the full significance of what he had done had not yet come home to him. Wretched as he was, he was still partially stunned with the suddenness of the catastrophe, and could not yet believe that he had cut himself off for ever from the woman he so passionately loved.

The lacing of white foam on the grey sea was a thing of the past, the water was growing almost oilily smooth, and the sun had sunk below the horizon nearly half an hour when a blink of light away to starboard announced the whereabouts of Fire Island ; a little while later another to port answered it—Sandy Hook. Then, with that startling suddenness that is so a feature of the approach to the States, the skyscrapers and the statue of Liberty appeared far down on the horizon, black against a band of clear, translucent green sky, and Gene, turning on his heel, made his way down to the main deck and his own cabin. There his luggage was ready, and it was time to dress for dinner, and, half an hour later, just as dinner came, the great ship slowed to a standstill and the pilot came aboard.

They anchored in the Narrows shortly before nine o'clock, and Gene spent the next two hours in the smoking-room, watching a game of poker and drinking heavily. When, at last, he went to bed his face was darkly flushed, his eyes dangerous, and, though he had far too good a head for his drink to upset him, he was nevertheless in an ugly mood.

The cursory inspection by the doctor at half-past seven the next morning, the slow journey up the river, the berthing at one of the great piers, and the disembarkation and Customs which followed was all

something of an unreality to Gene, who, when it was all over, took a rickety taxi up-town to the Ritz-Carlton.

New York lay under a steely sky, with a wind that cut like a knife sweeping down from the Pole across the great stretch of the northern land, and he shivered and mentally made a note that he must purchase a fur-lined coat ; and wondered immediately afterwards at himself for thinking of such trivialities.

He went down to luncheon and chose a table in a far corner of the restaurant, ordered lunch, and looked about him with an expression that would have warned the most obtuse individual not to claim acquaintance had there been anyone present who knew him. As it was he was recognised by no one until, the meal being over, he sat smoking over his coffee, when, unnoticed by him a big, fleshy man came into the restaurant and sat down some distance off. He ordered some food, but ate very little of it, and, from time to time, he looked across the room at Gene with narrowed eyes, and when Gene pushed back his chair, hastily paid his own bill and walked out of the place after him.

As for Gene, the immediate necessity of food now over, he found himself faced with several hours of idleness—indeed days, for the *Rorama* bearing Alma on board would not reach New York for two days at least, probably more after the great storm.

He went out into the bitter wind-swept street and, desirous of exercise, walked up Fifth Avenue to the Park, where he tramped for an hour ; then, with the short winter day closing in, and the dread of his own company strengthening with every hour, went back to the Avenue, bought a paper, scanned the amusements, called up a theatre and bought a stall for the evening's performance. Then was just making his way back to the Ritz-Carlton when a voice said at his ear : " Surely it's Hugon ? " and, wheeling sharply, he saw at his

side a man as tall as himself, muffled up in a huge overcoat with unmistakable "Englishman—soldier" stamped on him—clothes, bearing, hair-cut, everything about him; a man with fairish hair, growing a little grey on the temples, a short-clipped fairish moustache, keen blue eyes rather deeply set, and a quietly thoroughbred air about him singularly attractive. Seeing Gene's momentary perplexity, he smiled, showing very perfect teeth.

"I had the pleasure of meeting you at Mrs. Hilary Chalmington's one evening early last summer," he said. "My name is Napier."

Something in the pleasant voice and manner, perhaps the quietly assured certainty of himself, conquered Gene's ugly mood. He held out his hands.

"Of course I do now," he said. "I'm sorry to have been so stupid, but for a moment I didn't recognise you . . . not expecting to see you over here, I expect."

"I came across about two months ago," Napier said. "My wife wants to see something of this country"—he laughed a little—"and I am joining an expedition north that the National Geographic Society are sending in a month or two. We have been staying at the Baltimore prior to renting an apartment for the winter. But it's too cold to stand still. Which way were you going?"

"Back to my hotel—the Ritz-Carlton. Won't you come in with me? I'm sorry I can't offer you a whisky-and-soda; I haven't any."

Napier smiled. "Tea will do equally well," he said, "if you'll give me some. But I had no idea you were coming to New York this winter. I saw Donnisthorpe just before we sailed and he made no mention of it."

"He knew nothing," Gene said between shut teeth as they faced the driving rain. "I—it—I left at rather short notice."



"Yes. By Jove, what a wind! I should think we shall have a blizzard if this goes on."

"Yes—probably," Gene said absently; as he walked he was trying to find some way of countering any question Napier might ask, forgetting, through too long disassociation from his kind, that men of Napier's stamp do not ask questions, and it was not till they were having tea in the luxurious warmth of the lounge that he quite shook off the discomfort that the unexpected encounter caused. As for the General, used from his Sandhurst days to judge men, he knew quite well that some unforeseen, unguessed-at tragedy had brought his companion back to the States, with that look stamped on his face, and having heard of Gene's engagement to Phyllis Chalmington and knowing both the Chalmingtons and Donnisthorpe, he wondered, as he sat there talking pleasantly of various topics of the moment, what had happened.

"You did not meet my wife, I think," he said presently. "She was not at the dance, if I remember. You must come and dine with us. What are you doing to-night?"

"I booked a seat at the Garrick Theatre," Gene said. "Heard it's a good show."

"Yes, it is. Very. But it's dull going to a theatre alone. Why not dine with us instead? My wife would be delighted if you will, and we might all go on somewhere afterwards if you liked."

Much as he dreaded any social intercourse, Gene at this juncture dreaded his own company more; for, subconscious as the knowledge was, he knew nevertheless that he was holding thought at bay, that he had been so holding it ever since that dread night at Little Standingrydge.

"It's very kind of you," he said. "I should be only too pleased. As you say, it's dull work going alone



to a theatre, but I was at a loose end. I only landed this morning."

"Is that so? Well, we're lucky to have found you early in your visit. New York seems pretty busy over her internal affairs, doesn't she?"

They talked for a little on contemporary events. Then Napier rose to depart, made his farewell and went out into the street, where the first flakes of snow were beginning to fall, borne on the bosom of the icy wind. He refused the offer of a taxi and walked up the wide slope of Park Avenue to the big block of apartments near the Park, where his own was, and as he walked his firm mouth set determinedly and his eyes narrowed. Gene Hugon was on the brink of disaster, of that he was certain, and there remained the task of saving him without his being aware of the fact. No easy task.

He arrived home, found his wife had gone to her room, and, after dressing, went there, knocked, found her in the hands of her maid, waited till the girl was dismissed and took up a time-honoured position on the hearth

"Beatrice, I met Donnisthorpe's brother to-day," he said—"Gene Hugon. You remember my speaking of him, don't you? I've asked him to dinner."

Mrs. Napier, a rather tall woman of the statuesque English type, brown-haired, grey-eyed, with a creamy skin, a mouth of gracious curves and a certain serene beauty about her, as much of the soul as of the body, smiled across at her husband as she sat by her dressing-table.

"Is that so, dear? How pleasant! But why is he in New York? I thought he was engaged to the eldest Chalmington girl."

"So he was. And is, for all I know. But it's odd he's over here now. Look him over, Beatrice. I'm not satisfied."

" You think things may have gone amiss ? "

" Possibly. And, though Donnisthorpe is an old friend, I always blamed him for his treatment of his brother. At all events, form your own judgment. He's a strange type, but I like him."

" Ought we to ask anyone else ? "

" I don't think so. He does not give me the impression of a man craving society. That's a charming frock, dear."

So when Gene arrived a minute or two before eight Beatrice Napier " looked him over " as her husband had suggested, and welcomed him cordially, thinking all the while :

" Robert is right—quite right. There's something desperately wrong somewhere."

Dinner passed pleasantly ; Napier was an excellent host, his wife was no whit behind him, and Gene, despite the growing certainty that full realisation of what he had done was but a matter of a short time, enjoyed it nevertheless. But there were moments when the tension became noticeable, when for a moment his lips and jaw would harden, his eyes dilate as that clamouring tide of memory and knowledge threatened to batter down the conscious will, and they were not unnoticed by Mrs. Napier. She endorsed her husband's opinion heartily, yet gave no sign of so doing, and when presently, owing to a lengthy telephone call, she found herself alone with Gene, she took her courage in both hands.

" Mr. Hugon," she said, trying to speak quite naturally, " I have never even remembered to ask after Miss Chalmington. How is she ? You are to be married next month, are you not ? "

Under his tan that winter never removed, she saw his face whiten.

" Miss Chalmington and I are no longer engaged,"

he said rather hoarsely, and, getting up, he threw his cigarette into the fire and was a long time taking and lighting another. The reply was so brief, giving no room for any kind of comment, that Beatrice Napier felt for once at a loss. To utter any of the customary commonplaces to such a man seemed impossible, yet it was equally impossible to receive such a statement as if it were as unimportant as a remark about the weather. Searching for some appropriate word, she followed his example and got up from her chair ostensibly to reach for a screen to keep the fire from her eyes. And, as she did so, she saw that his hand lifted to the cigarette was shaking. The sight restored her confidence sufficiently to make her say very quietly :

"I am so very sorry—my dear," herself as astonished as anyone could be at the last two words, spoken because he had given her one quick look and then bent his head to bite on the wrist of his right hand, forcing back a sudden fierce rush of emotion.

"It may come right after all," she said again. "Things do—even when they seem worst. Don't lose courage."

She laid her hand on his arm, gave it a little pressure, then returned to her seat, and Gene raised his head with a jerk and went on smoking with savage haste, the cigarette burning all down one side.

And the result of Beatrice Napier's "looking over" was that she said later to her husband :

"I like him. And he's breaking his heart. There's some tragedy behind that affair, Robert, and we've got to get at it. If we don't he may do something desperate. He's the type who do."

As for Gene, he left the apartment about eleven and walked back to his hotel through whirling snow, savagely fighting back emotion, forcing his thoughts away from the danger zone, and cursing the country

because he could not even drown remembrance and get dead drunk. That, at least, would have purchased some hours of oblivion.

He found out how to get drink of a sort next day, and went through the next twenty-four hours half stupefied with the fiery poison that had been given him as pure whisky. On the day after that the *Rorama* came in, and his man brought Alma to the room he had taken for the day at an inconspicuous hotel, where he was waiting for her, a little flushed for him, eyes bloodshot and fierce, an ugly look about his mouth as he turned from the window at her entrance.

Wrapped in a showy fur coat, lips painted a vivid scarlet, cheeks rouged beneath too heavily darkened lashes, she came into the room with the undulating, slouching walk she had cultivated of late, looked round, took in his mood, and dropped into a chair.

"You got it good and soft for me, I *don't* think!" her voice loud and harshly unmodulated after Phyllis's soft tones. "See here, Gene, it ain't good for my constitution to travel so much. Makes me feel like twenty cents all the time."

Gene glared at her.

"Late to blame me, isn't it?" he said. "Who asked you to go to England?"

Still examining the room and only looking at him in short swift glances, she shrugged her shoulders, took a mirror and lip-salve from her bag and began reddening still more her scarlet mouth.

"Can't say anyone exactly asked me," she remarked. "But anyways when it's your husband about to fix up with somebody else—well, anyways it's time to get moving. All set up, wasn't it, Gene? What you chewing over for me, now, eh, Gene?"

"You've done enough mischief," Gene said savagely.

"Get out West to your people and stay there. You'll get the money—I've told you that already."

"Sure thing. All set to hit the ceiling, ain't you? See here, Gene, s'long as we're married, we're married, see? And no all-fired quittin'. You're my husband, and whatever you done to that girl you're not marrying her. No, *sir*!"

"Oh, go to hell!" Gene snarled, and turning his back stared out of the window into the whirling snow.

It seemed to him like some dreadful nightmare, that he should be once more alone with Alma whom he had believed dead; it brought back to him all the days of those early years in the States, the memory of his first meeting with Alma. She had been kind in her blatant way and he had been so wretchedly ill and lonely, and—had he realised it—pitifully young and cruelly hurt. In a moment of drunken folly he had asked her to marry him and she had kept him to it, thinking him rich, knowing him English, and her instinct telling her he was different from the rest of the men she knew. The awakening to both of them came quickly enough. Her innate coarseness and utter lack of morals, his temper and furious hatred of his fellow-men; it was small wonder marriage was hell for them both.

It seemed as though the last eight months of life had never been—as if Phyllis's love and charm and tenderness were the dream of another being than himself. The afternoons in the Manor gardens, or the green, quiet depths of Donnisthorpe park, the rides together about the lanes and woods and moor, the close and intimate companionship with its mental stimulus, its intellectual interest, its physical nearness and delight—all were infinitely removed from this dingily respectable New York hotel, with the snow piled on roof and pavement and Alma, vulgar, youthful, cheap.

In all his life Gene had never received from anyone

just that precious intimacy that Phyllis had given him ; he had not realised how wonderful a thing it is when a man and woman are one in things of the intellect and spirit as well as those of the body. Its rarity, he knew, its amazing glory he knew too—now. And in place of Phyllis stood Alma.

He felt suddenly nauseated when he thought that once he had lain in her arms, had kissed that wet-lipped, too-red mouth ; even though more than eight years had passed he still felt unclean in body when the memory returned.

Alma's voice interrupted his thoughts with sudden temper.

"Are you all aimin' to make trouble?" she said. "I guess you ain't set on playing any Romeo-stuff to me, an' it's a cinch I'm jest sick of you! Fetch that English girl over! I reckon you an' she know a thing or two——"

Breathing unsteadily, Gene turned round, hands clenching and unclenching, and Alma, in her cheap smartness, cigarette in one hand, mirror in the other, let forth just what she thought of the relationship between them till she broke off with a choked cry and Gene's fingers at her throat. He came to himself in time, loosed his grip and fell back, and Alma, white-faced, half-frightened, half-exultant that she still had power to move him even if it was only to fury, got to her feet, caressing her bruised neck.



GENERAL NAPIER, calling at the Ritz-Carlton an hour or two later, was told he could go up to Gene's room, and did so, heard a reply to his knock and entered to find Gene seated at the table, his arms flung across it, his head buried. An empty whisky bottle lay on the floor, a glass stood at his elbow, the room was thick with tobacco smoke and much overheated, and, as he entered and Gene raised his head, he saw that one hand grasped the butt of a revolver. A close observer might have seen Napier's infinitesimal start, but Gene was in no condition to observe shades of movement. His flushed face and fierce, bloodshot eyes, his tumbled hair and the disorder of tie and collar made of him a tragic figure in contrast with what the elder man knew; and as his dulled brain took in the reality of Napier's presence, he pushed something lying on the table out of sight back into his pocket.

"Hugon! Put that gun down!"

The peremptory tones might have been uttered in an orderly room, and the stern, contemptuous glance beat down that of the man at the table. Without hurry, almost without seeming to move, Napier had taken the revolver from Gene's unresisting fingers, jerked the cartridges out and flung the empty thing back on the table.

"Now," he said briefly, "pull yourself together and tell me what's the matter."

As if the cool, sharp tones had suddenly penetrated

his brain, intelligence crept back into Gene's eyes, and with it a look of such fierce and desperate misery that Napier, in no mood to be softened, yet was forced to pity. Going round to him, he laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Come, Hugon, this is no way to take a knock," he said. "Suppose you try and tell me what has happened."

Very slowly Gene pulled himself upright in his chair, and, with hands that shook a little, fumbled at his collar.

"If you'd come—ten minutes later——" he began thickly, and, still shaking, got to his feet.

"I'm done," he said, still in that thick, dragging voice. "Let me alone—for God's sake."

Tall as Gene was, Napier was half a head taller and strong as a lion; with no more ado he slipped an arm round him, led him, unresisting, into the fresher air of the bedroom, undressed him—Gene neither protesting nor speaking, put him in bed and sponged face and throat and neck in icy water. And, coming back from the adjoining bathroom, found Gene raised on one elbow looking at him with eyes no longer dull.

"It's good of you—General——" he said, slowly and painfully, as if speech were physically difficult. "I've been making a fool of myself—they oughtn't to have sent you up."

"They telephoned up," Napier answered, sitting down on the foot of the bed and lighting a cigarette, "and you answered."

"Did I?" He laughed shortly and dropped back again on the pillows. "I must have been worse than I thought. . . . Anyway . . . I owe you an apology."

"Nonsense, my dear fella. But, all the same, I'm

not happy about leaving you here—an hotel is a soulless place at the best of times, especially when things are going crookedly. How long do you expect to be in New York ? ”

“ Not a day longer than I can help. And that will be about Monday, I think. Yes, Monday.”

“ And to-day is Thursday. Well, why not leave here and come over to our apartment ? My wife will be delighted to have you, and so shall I. She has been worrying me to ask you since Tuesday night, but I thought you'd probably have made your own arrangements.”

For a moment Gene was silent, taken aback by the invitation ; then, looking down, he spoke a little unsteadily.

“ You saw the state I was in——”

Napier, watching him closely, laughed.

“ You won't get poison given you if you want a drink,” he said, purposely ignoring the darker side of the picture. “ A glass of the stuff you had in there would put me under the table.”

Gene, twisting a button on his pyjama jacket, spoke low.

“ I wasn't too drunk to know what I meant to do,” he said. “ If you'd come a few minutes later—— God ! Why didn't you ? ”

He collapsed suddenly, hiding his face, and, after a minute or two, Napier rose and laid a hand on his shoulder.

“ Hugon—my dear boy—a man doesn't try to take his life for nothing. Won't you trust me enough to tell me what's amiss ? I might be able to help. I've seen a good many odd things in my life, and very often a situation isn't as bad as it appears.”

From the tumbled pillows Gene's voice came thickly.

"It's a pretty sordid story. Part of it is public property. . . . I can't accept your invitation but I'm grateful . . . and no one can help . . . it's not that I don't trust you, but it's just useless."

"Very well then. But why not come to the flat?"

"I can't. I've got to be here—to see someone. If I may I'll come to dinner—when I've settled things. Sunday. I'm going out to the West then."

Napier agreed. He knew it was useless to press for confidence, but he determined nevertheless to keep in touch with Gene, and soon after, assured that the urgent need was over, he took his departure, taking the precaution also to carry Gene's gun off with him.

As for Gene, worn out by all he had gone through, he slept heavily, waking late the next morning, and as he made his toilet realised with painful clearness that he had made a fool of himself. There is nothing quite so stimulating as such knowledge to some natures, and in Gene's case it enabled him to pull himself together as nothing else could. He had been very near whining for sympathy, and such realisation stung him back to his old self-contained reserve.

Alma, when he saw her to make final arrangements for the legal separation and divorce if he could get it, found him no longer vulnerable as to temper, but cool, remote, indifferent alike to her rages, taunts, or allurements. During the final interview she refused to make any use of the law, and was with difficulty persuaded to sign an agreement with regard to the allowance he proposed making her on condition she did not leave the States. In reality there was nothing she desired less than to leave them, but on principle she made all the trouble she could, and even Gene's lawyer found his patience and tact nearly exhausted when finally she departed. As for Gene, he dined with the Napiers, once more the man the General had met in England, and by mutual

understanding neither man referred to that meeting at the Ritz-Carlton, not even when the latter handed back Gene's gun with no word of apology, Gene even smiling a grim little twisted smile.

The next day he left New York for Arizona.

A MAID came into the morning-room at Little Stand-ingrydge with the afternoon letters, and Phyllis, interrupted in her letter-writing, turned to take them from the salver, saw an American stamp and felt a little shock run through her.

She could hardly wait till the maid had closed the door behind her before tearing open the envelope, and, as she read, her pulses beat painfully in throat and temples, for the letter was from Beatrice Napier and its contents of absorbing interest.

The Napiers were acquaintances only, friends of Hilary Chalmington and Norah, whom they had known in India for many years, and that Beatrice Napier should write a long letter to her Phyllis presupposed some matter of urgency. It began indeed by stating that fact, and then went on to the reason of the letter—a recounting of the meeting with Gene Hugon in New York, his state of mind—in so far as Beatrice knew it, which did not include the history of her husband's visit to Gene's rooms on that fateful night—and an apology for writing at all.

“I may have committed an unpardonable *bêtise*,” the letter ran. “Certainly I have intruded myself into affairs that are yours and yours only, and I have no excuse except an instinct—almost desperate—that has forced me to write to you. Whether you are to



marry Gene Hugon or not is really nothing to do with it. Why I have told you all this is because I am positively certain that he will meet with some tragedy very soon. He is a desperate man facing some tremendous crisis; and if you can help him, do so. Do forgive me. I almost think myself mad to write this, and yet I could not help it. Mr. Hugon left for the West on Christmas Eve and we had a short note from him about five weeks ago. I enclose the address he was then at. But he said he was leaving soon. Any letter sent c/o of my husband will, I should imagine, stand a good chance of reaching him."

On a slip of paper an address of a ranch in Arizona was scribbled, and Phyllis let the letter drop and sat there thinking, every now and then reading the pencilled words over and over again as though they could in some way tell her all that she longed to know.

It was an afternoon in late March, with a dull steely sky above, windless air and a black frost binding the country-side in bleak immobility, and the wide view from the windows looked singularly desolate.

Phyllis had returned two days previously from town, where she had been to see Cathleen, who had a small flat in Chelsea with her baby daughter, nurse and maid, to find her tiny stepbrother ill with some baby ailment and old Nannie tired out with want of sleep. Consequently she had taken charge of him for two nights and now he was restored to the nursery and practically recovered, whereby a weight was lifted off everyone's mind, for Joyce's motherless little son was an appealing little figure and everyone in the house loved him.

During those first sad days after Joyce's death Phyllis had had little time to think of her own tragedy, for Hugh, grey-faced and silent, needed all her care,

and she fought to keep her own desperate fear and grief in the background. It was, too, almost impossible for her to believe at first that Gene had actually left the country, and it was only when she heard from Lord Donnisthorpe himself that she could believe the truth.

Hugh was so wrapped up in his own grief that he hardly was aware of his daughter's, and for once did not realise the ordeal through which she was passing, and Phyllis during that dreadful hour when the truth of Gene's silence first dawned on her was utterly alone.

She telephoned the Castle, heard from Lord Donnisthorpe of Gene's abrupt departure and repeated her question, terrified of the answer it might draw forth. "He's in London, then? Surely you know where?"

Over the wire Donnisthorpe's usually cold voice came with unaccustomed gentleness of tone.

"He went to town last night, or rather this morning, immediately after leaving the Manor, and left no word here except for his man to pack all his things and send them c/o The American Express. I am trying to find out where he has gone, Miss Chalmington, but it may take a few days."

At any other time Phyllis would have gone straight to town and herself set about finding her lover, but at this juncture it was impossible, and, desperately anxious, hoping against hope, she waited till the funeral was over, and got back to the Manor only to have Donnisthorpe himself announced just after tea.

He had asked for her and been shown into the morning-room, had apologised for his visit at such a time, and then, as kindly as he could, had broken the news to her of Gene's departure for New York.

At first she had found it impossible to believe, then as repetition forced her to acknowledgment and she realised that Gene had gone, perhaps for ever, she stood

there at first dazed by the blow, then bitterly self-accusing. If only she had run down to him, even if it had been for a moment ; if only, amidst the desperate anxiety of Joyce's fight for life, she had spared just the few seconds needed to return to the library, put her arms about him, give him her lips and assure him of her love and trust ! She saw now only too plainly his misreading of her absence, and at the thought of his suffering, of the dragging minutes of his waiting, his anguish and remorse and suspense, she felt her heart would break.

She cabled to him in New York, care of the White Star and the Cunard lines, and a clerk's mistake delayed the cable till he had left the ship, received no answer, and, beginning to understand what had happened, faced life in blank bewilderment. She did not despair at first. It did not seem possible that her love should not find a way to discover his location, but days lengthened into a week, a week into a month, and no word came to her. Gene had vanished utterly, and till this March afternoon not one word of him had come to her.

The news, scanty as it was, was like cool water to a man dying of thirst ; she read and re-read Beatrice Napier's letter, very near tears, fought them back and whispered Gene's name over and over again. She knew now a little of what he must have suffered in believing she had turned from him, and for the first time alone in the quiet room faced the whole situation and thought over the future. She had never doubted Gene for one instant, either then or since, when he had said he believed Alma to be dead, and somehow, some way, she must get that fact to him. Why he had ever married such a girl was strange enough, but she knew men well enough to realise that, given such conditions of life as Gene and such a stormy

temperament, strange things were bound to happen. She could not judge him as she would have judged Maurice or Leon—and thinking of Leon she considered anew how very odd his conduct had been. She had expected him to condemn Gene utterly—on the contrary she found he kept silence, only once saying shortly to his cousin, Gerald Chalmington :

“ A lawyer who could let him down like that wants a horse-whipping.”

As for Maurice, he had of late become more and more taciturn, withdrawing into himself, living his own life and—as she feared—suffering a good deal. Judy, who was at school, seemed the only companion he cared to have, and she returned to spend every week-end at home, to the scandal of her mistresses. Hugh, however, caring nothing for so-called education and everything for moulding his younger daughter into a charming and lovable woman, insisted, and school-rules had to give way. It being Saturday she was at home now and with Maurice in his own sitting-room at the other end of the house, poring over some maps she had to do. Hugh was out riding with Leon, who was down from town for the Sunday, and Phyllis felt free to sit alone.

It was very quiet. The slow tick of the old clock and the occasional soft crash of a falling coal or log the only sound to break the silence, and presently the droning murmur of wind in the keyhole as a faint breeze began to stir in the outer world.

Beatrice Napier's letter was the first gleam of hope she had had in all the dreary heart-break of the last two and a half months, and now she forced aside the desire to weep her heart out for the man she loved, and made herself instead try to find a plan to reach him.

Divorce was comparatively easy in the States. Such a marriage as this could surely be annulled or

broken, for it was a mockery of love and God to suppose it sacred ; and such a woman surely could be bought off with money, and Gene had money now. If only she could get to America she felt that she would at least stand a chance of finding him, whereas now to post letters was simply wasting time, for she had no clue whatever to his position or habitation. She had learned from Donnisthorpe that Gene had sent his wife back and that was all ; neither Donnisthorpe himself, nor the solicitors, knew more except that—pending Alma's signature—a generous allowance was to be paid to her on certain conditions. But Phyllis felt she could not leave home yet even to find her lover, for after all such a quest might mean months or even years, and Hugh must not be left, even though, at present, he seemed almost like a stranger, silent, self-absorbed, remote from everyone.

Phyllis felt sometimes that she could have borne it better if he had been himself, if he had seemed to care, or be aware of his daughter's grief ; but he moved through life apparently indifferent to everything, stunned by the suddenness of the blow, seeing his tiny son once a day with punctilious regularity, but exhibiting no affection for him. It was Phyllis who mothered the baby, watching and loving him as tenderly as if he were her own, spending many a half-hour in the nursery, soothed by its warmth and quiet, beside the baby's cot, sometimes watching him, sometimes looking out to the far-distant western hills, while old Nannie watched her with an ache at her kindly heart, guessing why she watched that view with such grave, sad eyes.

Cathleen, Phyllis missed sorely. Of late the two sisters had been so much more intimate, and with her departure and Leon's much of the constant change and gaiety that young people bring was for the time being



gone from the house. Last winter there had been dances, hunting, dinners—even Maurice had joined in the cheerful life of the house—and now, save in the children's quarters, all was subdued. There, the natural resilience of childhood made prolonged sorrowing impossible. Angela had wept copiously and still sometimes stole away by herself, but Ronnie's companionship, Judy's Saturday arrivals, and the new little brother filled her horizon fairly well and happiness was coming back to her.

The grandfather clock in the hall struck four, and Phyllis, roused by the sound, went over to the big window and scanned the stretch of garden, lawn, and wooded slope of country. The branches were moving, and opening the window for a moment she realised that a change had taken place, for the air was warmer and black frost no longer held the world motionless; a wind was coming from the north-west. As she turned from the window she saw Hugh's big grey horse pass up the drive to the stables on the right, and presently, as Hugh himself did not join her, and it was nearly tea-time, she went in search of him.

A knock at the library door brought no answer, and entering she saw him at the writing-table, head buried in his hands, and for a moment wanted to turn and leave him. Then, summoning her courage, she closed the door softly, went across the room, and putting an arm about his neck bent her cheek on his head.

"Hugh!" she said shakily. "Oh, Hugh—*dear!*" and, without warning, she burst into bitter weeping.

It was half an hour later before, arm-in-arm, they went in to tea, Phyllis heavy-eyed and pale, yet comforted for the first time; Hugh very tender over her, realising how selfish he had been in his own grief.

They had tea alone together, Maurice having chosen



the nursery and the company of the children, and presently, listening to the rising wind, Phyllis shivered ; it reminded her of that dreadful December night which had seen the end of happiness for herself and Hugh. Hastily, to drown thought, she spoke at random.

"General Napier was an Engineer, wasn't he? I liked him when I met him at Wrexford. Did you know him before?"

"Casually. Yes—he was a very fine soldier and a very good fellow. His wife has always been a great friend of Norah's."

"He's joined an expedition to Alaska."

"Has he?" Suddenly aware of what she was saying, Hugh looked up. "How do you know?"

For answer Phyllis passed the letter across and waited in silence while he read it, then as he handed it back said :

"It was strange of her to write—and kind."

"Very. We must talk this over, Phyllis—I blame myself for not having done so before."

"I must find him," she said, her lips suddenly trembling. "You see what she says—desperate! It may be too late even now."

"I'll cable to this address ; hang on to your courage, darling. Perhaps in some way your belief in him may keep the worst danger away."

Two lengthy cables were sent off after tea, one to Gene at the address given, one to Mrs. Napier in New York, and, a little comforted that action was at last taken, Phyllis was able to face the future more calmly.

THE sun had just set, a ball of rayless fire in an orange sky, as Gene strolled out of the hotel and stood bare-headed in the dusk. Before him the modest buildings of the railway depot stood blackly against the sky; on either hand the road, if road it could be called, led in a wide, dusty stretch past the handful of shacks and houses that made up the township of Eliot; and behind him and the building that was known as Kent's Hotel the land lay open, looking like desert, though here and there a few bushes and blades of green showed some rough cultivation.

For three months Gene had knocked about Arizona and Texas, trying in vain to settle down, or make up his mind to get out to some other part of the world; but some demon of restlessness drove him on, till on this particular evening in early May he found himself in this insignificant township. There had been talk of gold in the bed of the tributary of the Little Colorado, and since Gene craved two things—hard work and excitement—he decided to work a claim if the rush promised a sufficiency of the latter.

He had been at Eliot a week, and decided against the job. And now, scanty personal luggage packed up, was waiting for the trans-continental west-bound train due at eight-thirty.

The light from the approaching engine came in sight at last, a mere speck on the horizon that grew rapidly larger and brighter; and when the great train

belled itself up to the platform Gene, with never a glance around him, swung himself aboard.

A few passengers stepped off and took brisk walks up and down the platform, but the train only waited ten minutes, and Gene, throwing himself down into his seat, did not even glance at his fellow-travellers, but stared gloomily and unseeingly out of the window.

They were due at San Francisco in the morning, and there was that indescribable air about the passengers that speaks of a tedious journey nearly accomplished. Everybody was relieved to think a lengthy and hot trip was almost over, and Gene, in common with the rest, went to bed early and—because he was healthy—slept soundly till he was called in the morning.

He went in to breakfast rather late and gave his order before glancing at the man who sat opposite him; and then, meeting his eyes, hardly checked a start. Grey, lined, still bronzed like an Indian and still a fine specimen of his race, the man who sat opposite to him was his one-time captor, Sheriff Westman.

The years had altered him from middle to definitely old age, but it was unmistakably the same face, and for that minute before recognition must come half a dozen thoughts flashed through Gene's brain. He could get up and go to another seat—such a quick glance could not make the old man certain; he could be more English than the English and make Westman believe himself the victim of an extraordinary resemblance. There were several courses of action, yet, in the end, he took the simplest by leaning forward and saying, in a low voice:

“Morning, Sheriff. Do you remember me?”

The other man stared, stared, frowned perplexedly, stared again.

"Waal," he began, with his slow Western drawl, "can't say as how—wait a bit though——"

He scanned Gene's features with narrowed eyes, noted the well-cut perfection of English thin grey tweeds, blue shirt and black tie, made as if to speak, then shook his head.

"You got me blind," he said at last. "I seem to kinda remember—and then——"

"Then you don't. I'm not surprised. The last time we met was daybreak—Stone Canyon, Texas—I've not forgotten."

The elder man stared again, then an unbelieving expression dawned in his face.

"Yaas. I know you. I'm——" He checked the violent exclamation, hesitated in very evident perplexity, then went on: "What's come to you? You all look kinda different—an' you don't even speak the same."

"I got out as you advised," Gene answered. "And then I had news from England and went back. I've been there nearly a year."

The other nodded, and then as breakfast came they began to talk and later went out to the observation car and stood there looking over the rail and smoking perilous cigars of the "stogie" type till the distant buildings of Oakland became visible. It seemed that the one-time Sheriff had in retiring bought a little house south of San Francisco where he raised chickens and devoted his leisure time to his garden, and Gene, his one-time prisoner, promised to look him up when they parted on the ferry as it approached San Francisco across the dancing blue water of the Bay.

As for Gene, he had no idea of his future plans. He hardly knew why he had come to San Francisco even. There was no reason for him to go to any place or to stay anywhere; the reason of life itself seemed to have

ceased to exist, and the future was meaningless. He expected that the divorce would soon be accomplished, but even so what would it matter? His marriage, his silence, the damning evidence of Alma in the flesh—nothing could alter the thing that had been, or blot out the memory from Phyllis's mind.

He drove to an hotel, booked a room, and turned away from the desk to run against no other person than General Napier himself.

After the first surprised greetings he learned that the General was with two other men and going north that night to meet a fourth at Seattle, where they would take the boat for Alaska, thus starting on the expedition to make a further exploration of the volcanic phenomena around Mount Katmai and the valley of Ten Thousand Smokes.

Interested despite himself, Gene listened and questioned, and quite suddenly propounded a question:

"Is there a possibility of my joining you? Of course I bear my own share of expenses."

In Napier's pocket-book reposed a letter from his wife in New York, and in the letter were the following lines:

"I wrote to Miss Chalmington after all last month, and had a reply to-day. She is sending a letter by the same mail for me to forward to Mr. Hugon, but up to posting this it has not arrived."

Wondering if he should mention the fact, then coming to the conclusion that it was no business of his, he put it for the moment out of his mind and instead answered Gene's question.

"If you really mean that, I see no reason why not. We outfit at Seattle as quickly as we can and go north at once. There is rumour of another big eruption having taken place, and much increased activity, and we want to get there quickly."

The idea fascinated Gene, holding out prospects of interest, hardship, danger. It was what he wanted, something to occupy the attention of mind and body and help him to forget the past through the sheer physical weariness of the present. So the night saw them travelling northward on the dreary line that winds up the Sacramento Valley towards the Shasta Pass, and, two days later, at Seattle, Gene met the other four members of the expedition the National Geographic Society was sending out, the other members being already on their way. The four consisted of a Captain Parr, who knowing that part of the Alaskan coast had been chosen to lead the expedition ; Hunter of the United States Geological Survey Dept. ; Washburn, the camera man ; and the famous American scientist, Professor Henry Baker.

Napier knew them all, and, as an engineer of great experience, promised to be of valuable service to the party, and Gene was welcomed as a wealthy Englishman intensely interested in any kind of exploration that held danger, willing to bear a generous share of the expense.

The thirteen days on board the steamer passed pleasantly and not too slowly, for the beautiful and ever-changing scenery of the trip could not but heal something of Gene's restlessness ; but he was still too centred on himself to make a real effort at either recovery or forgetfulness, and added to his mental wretchedness was a physical unease that showed itself in broken sleep and vague malaise. Phyllis's personality was for ever with him ; in dreams he was always on the point of embracing her ; in waking hours he was constantly thinking and remembering ; and such unceasing thought had scored new lines about his mouth and brow and set a haunted desperation in his eyes that at times startled his companions.



On an afternoon in early June the boat reached the island of Kodiak, the only settlement, and that chiefly Russian, in that part of the country, and the sight of the small town nestling at the foot of a sloping mountain shoulder caused the first gleam of real interest in affairs other than his own to enter Gene's mind.

The landing stages, like those of most Alaskan settlements, were built on piles; the buildings were mostly whitewashed, with wide low-pitched roofs; and, for the moment, he thought the whole place snow-buried, despite the season, till, stepping on shore, he realised that what he imagined to be snow was volcanic ash.

White ash covered the hill-side, white ash weighed down roofs, muffled footfalls, hid grass and bushes in a uniform mantle, and Gene found himself studying the place with curiosity that was gradually developing into interest, for Kodiak faced eastward across the Pacific, and the width of the island and then that of the treacherous Strait of Shelikoff lay between the little town and the mainland where the volcanic area lay.

There was little time spent at Kodiak, only a distribution of stores, an arrangement with a man who lived there and arranged to take the expedition across the treacherous Strait and bring it back when its work was finished, and then came the departure on the hundred-mile trip to the volcanoes. The evening of the day before, Gene went off by himself and, crossing the shoulder of the mountain, found himself looking over a rolling, peaceful country, where blue-top grass was growing in any place sheltered from the ash, and several settlers' farms promised a future of prosperity—the white palings and sleek Galloway cattle making a home-like picture despite

the drift of ash in all exposed places which spoke of the terrific forces at work beyond the north-western horizon. On his way back he met Napier and a short, sturdy fisherman whom he introduced as Bob Lee, and the three turned back together as Lee talked.

"I was at Cold Bay—it's a good many miles off—when the mountain blew up. It was pitch dark there, and hot pumice and ashes. Katmai village is still buried. No one will go back since 1912."

Like most of his type it was difficult to get any detailed description of this last catastrophe, and presently they gave it up and bade him good night, whereon Napier turned to Gene.

"I was up here in 1912," he remarked. "It was just after I retired, and I spent the summer up here with the preliminary expedition. It's a wonderful and terrible place, Hugon—there's nothing like it in the world, and I've seen most of the great sights. Think of a valley over seventeen miles long and a good many miles wide with thousands of steaming vents on its floor . . . it's indescribable. You must see it for yourself."

Gene nodded. Already he was more interested than he had been in anything since that dreadful evening at Standingrydge, but just now his gaze was riveted on the little ash-covered town below him. It was his last link with civilisation, and represented to him the last possibility of news. A wireless station was situated there, a boat came regularly from Seattle and Vancouver; and staring half-absently at it, he realised that subconsciously he had been hoping for some word from England—a letter—a message—a cable—what he did not know. As if he divined his companion's thoughts, Napier suddenly interrupted them.

"I've been making arrangements for any mail this

afternoon," he said. "We expect to be away three months and all mail will await us in Vancouver. It's useless to be sent to Kodiak. We're too uncertain. I've been expecting another letter from my wife, but"—he thought of what she had said with regard to Phyllis's letter to Gene—"it has not arrived."

Gene made some half-articulate answer. It was hardly likely any news would, or could, come for him; no one knew his address, or knew where he had gone. His lawyer in New York was to receive word when he had anything like a permanent one. But, otherwise, no living being knew of his whereabouts, save Napier and the other members of the expedition, who were utterly uninterested in anything but the work in hand. He scorned his own longing, and, changing the subject abruptly, asked about some detail of the journey ahead.

"Yes, we've got to carry everything into the destroyed zone with us—it was absolute desolation when I was there in 1912 and I believe it's no whit altered. You're not looking too fit, Hugon. Think you can stand the strain?"

Gene threw him a quick glance.

"I only want exercise," he said shortly. "Can't stand weeks of train and steamer. I'm stale."

Napier nodded. He frankly admitted to himself that he was curious as to the tragedy that had led to the present position, but he never expected to have his curiosity gratified, and the non-arrival of the letter of which his wife had spoken led him to suppose that Phyllis Chalmington had changed her mind and broken off her engagement in the normal way.

The next morning saw them cross the thirty-five miles of Shelikoff Strait, on a day when that turbulent, treacherous strip of water was dead calm, and as the small vessel approached the mainland everybody was

curious to see the quantities of fresh pumice floating about and to note the thick haze in the atmosphere despite the brilliantly shining sun, for the air was thick with volcanic dust and the land was a desolation of ash-covered mud. The little settlement of Katmai, in ruins since the first gigantic eruption of 1912, showed its little orthodox Russian church still standing crookedly, with a few leaf-stripped, prostrate tree-trunks lying near, and just beyond, where a wide-spreading shallow creek meandered down from the higher slopes, the trees rose from the current, bare, white of branch and twig, killed by a blast from the volcano—a dreadful scene indeed of death.

A base camp was pitched, and a day or two after the real journey into the interior began—a weary tramp through ash-slides, mud floes, the quicksands of wandering creeks, across perilous snow-bridges as the track ascended, and the first night's camp, with dust and grit blowing about the tents and clouds hiding all sight of the volcanoes. Those members of the expedition who were on their first trip expressed some doubt if the sights they were promised, and the wonder that awaited them, would come up to expectation.

"GET up, Hugon—it's clear now."

Gene, yawning and muttering, awaked to find Hunter shaking him by the shoulder, and, rolling over, he got up and thrust his head out of the tent. His long, low whistle was eloquent of his feelings as he gazed, for before him rose the great slopes of mud-covered snow, to the left a wonderful gorge of the Katmai River, as vividly coloured and in its 4,000 feet of depth almost as impressive as his own well-known Grand Canyon of the Colorado. Above, was a clear pale-blue sky, lightly streaked here and there with cirrus cloud, and in the distance, above the peaks to the west, a majestic column of steam towered whitely against the blue.

"That's the crater of Katmai," Hunter's voice said behind him. "Hurry up with some food. Parr and Washburn are going to make a dash for the rim."

Gene stayed one moment longer to observe that a saddle-like isthmus connected Katmai and three wonderful peaks to one side, from behind which another great steam-cloud rose some miles away; then made his hasty toilet, ate an even hastier breakfast, and started after the other two, who were already some quarter of a mile ahead. As he climbed, sliding and sticking in the mud-covered snow, he was conscious of a curious thrilling excitement, and presently, overtaking the others, was greeted by Parr with explosive energy.

"Hell, man! Do you want to throw your life away?"

Too utterly taken aback even to answer, Hugon stopped dead in his tracks, and, as he did so, a stretch of mud he had that instant crossed slid away, with a curious hissing movement, and a jet of steam shot upwards from a cavernous depth below.

Gene felt a qualm of nausea at the appalling fate so nearly suffered as Parr gave his orders.

"Step to the left—lively now—follow our track. We'll wait."

Watching with exquisite care to see exactly where the former footsteps were, Gene traversed the stretch between him and the waiting men, and as he came up to them, Washburn shrugged expressive shoulders.

"This isn't a place to play hide-and-seek in," he said. "It must half of it be hollow. Look at that!"

A few yards away, steam was rising from some cracks in the ground, and, stepping cautiously toward the place, he thrust his ice-axe into the mud with some force and instantly a rent appeared and steam shot upwards, with a hiss.

"Bit too like a taste of the future to please me," he said, with a short laugh. "I'll be better pleased to come back than go."

"The whole place is riddled with galleries and pits," Parr said. "Let's get on. Hitch on to the rope, Hugon."

Gene obediently tied the rope that connected the other two to himself, mountaineering fashion, and the three resumed their tramp, the way growing steeper and the snow thicker as they reached the higher levels; Washburn flagging a little, for he refused utterly to allow either of the other two to carry his big camera, which with its tripod stand weighed all of twenty pounds. As for Gene, before they reached



the last few hundred yards to the rim of the crater, he was aching and weary, and the fact that the other summits were clear and Katmai wrapped in dark clouds was not encouraging. Just as he was wondering if the dreadful toil was worth it, Parr turned round and shouted :

" Nice thing if we get to the top and poke our noses in a steam jet! Most of this is coming from the crater."

" Stinking smell of sulphur! " Washburn called back, his voice sounding weak and thin through the noise of escaping steam and the subterranean rumble of the volcano. " Must be—— "

What it must be was not spoken, for with a yell he broke off to dodge frantically and nearly jerk the other two men to their faces as, with a sudden puff of cloud and steam, there came a flying bomb of pumice from the thickness ahead of them, followed by another and another.

" Crater's working! " Parr yelled from his more advanced position. " We've no time to waste—— "

With a superhuman effort the three broke into a staggering run up the last few yards, felt a whiff of sulphurous gas blown past them by a wind that swept up the mountain's sides, and the next instant found themselves on the extreme of the crater's edge.

" God! "

Parr's ejaculation was far from irreverent, for nothing less than the Infinite could be invoked or compared to the stupendous sight before them; and Gene, all thought of self swept away, felt the first feeling of awe that he had ever known creep into his soul.

From where he stood, the inner wall of the crater dropped sheer for nearly two thousand feet to a vast lake several miles in circumference, of boiling, seething

lava and water, in colour a vivid blue-green, vitriolic in its shade, wicked in its atmosphere and unnatural hue. Somewhere near the centre a fragmentary ash-cone rose from the heaving mass, and around the further walls the same wonderful bluish green occasionally appeared amidst the strata of tufa and lava.

For a minute or two, awed into silence, motionless, dumbfounded, the three looked, then Washburn tore at the straps of the camera, and Gene snatching the tripod fixed it as evenly as he could, only to be nearly deafened by a roar from below as a great cloud of steam shot into the air and a puff of sulphurous smoke swept across them blotting out everything around.

"Curse it—curse it!" Parr stammered, too overcome to be his usual calm self. "It's got to clear—it must. Are you ready, Washburn, if it does?"

"'Course I'm ready!" Washburn snapped. "Ain't I lugged the darn thing all this way? 'Tain't likely I'm forgetting what for."

Parr passed over the irritation—the spectacle they had just seen was one to upset any nerves, and nerves take men various ways; it was Gene who held plates ready and stood by, while Parr tried to take bearings and measurements, and, after an incredibly long period of waiting in the roar of the escaping steam and the reek of sulphurous gases, another buffet of wind cleared steam and cloud away and, with a yelp of excitement and joy, Washburn took some hurried pictures.

Clouds other than those of the volcano were gathering from the south and west, and Parr, knowing the distance they had come, gave the word to return, and reluctantly Gene turned his back on the great crater, realising as he moved that feet and legs were icy-cold and boots and gaiters soaked through.

The long trail back to the camp was a weary business

and took five hours, but when it was ended each man declared it well worth while, and future plans were discussed at once.

"In a couple of days we'll start for the valley of Ten Thousand Smokes," Parr said, stretching weary limbs with a yawn. "You've been there, Napier, haven't you?"

Nappier nodded sleepily.

"Yes. In 1912—and since," he said. "You'll see the most astounding sight in the world, Hugon. It's unbelievable. Thousands of steam vents in a great valley. By Jove! I'm sleepy."

And Gene, for the first time for months, fell asleep without going through the helpless agony that had made his nights a horror for so long.

They started early, repeated much of the previous toil, but left Mount Katmai away to the side and made their way over the Katmai Pass, to halt just over a little rise of land.

"Look ahead!" Hunter said, laying a hand on Gene's arm. "D'you see that little puff of steam ahead? Two of 'em—and one or two more off there?"

Gene looked about him. In different places about the wide pass little puffs of white steam shot into the air, or crept along the stony muddy ground, and it was evident that a goodly store of volcanic energy lay beneath their feet; still he hardly considered the sight the most wonderful in the world, and said so, whereupon Napier and Hunter both laughed.

"This isn't the valley," the latter exclaimed. "That's over the rise yonder. Come on, boys, let's show him!"

And show him they did, with the result that Gene uttered one sharp exclamation and then stood motionless trying to grasp the scene he saw: a valley several miles wide and many long, surrounded by low hills,

the whole floor of which appeared to be steaming ; its furthest distance apparently closed by two smoking volcanoes. On every side were vents and fumaroles, some large, some small—all far bigger than they appeared, extending up the slopes of the surrounding hills—thousands and thousands of volcanoes in miniature over miles of country underneath a cloudy grey sky, surrounded by a land made desolate by the mighty monsters that lay quiescent only to prepare for another act of furious destruction.

Some of the party went on, but Gene could not stir ; used as he was to many wonderful sights, that now before him took his breath away and frankly frightened him. The roar of the escaping steams, the foul smell of sulphuretted hydrogen, the desolation of all around, and this sinister valley hidden among its ring of active volcanoes presented to him a picture of horror as well as wonder.

Camp was pitched half-way up a slope overlooking the valley close by a snow-drift and facing—but not too near—a mild-looking fumarole, for previous experience had taught the members of the expedition that they had every convenience for cooking food. Indeed the preparation for meals during the next few weeks' work of surveying, etc., amused Gene immensely, and he undertook to hang the stewpots over the two little vents where the superheated steam surrounded them and cooked everything to perfection.

" Don't know why we can't fry flapjacks and bacon too," one of the men—Clark by name—grumbled on the third day of Gene's new job. " It's hot enough to fry the Pole."

Gene looked up from his careful watching of the pot which, contrary to the teaching of youth, was boiling vigorously.

"What's that? Think I ought to fry bacon? Very well then. Come and try with me!"

"I'm not the cook," Clark grinned. "There's a hell of a fella down by that drift—see him? I poked a stick in this morning and it charred in less than a minute."

"I'll do it then," Gene retorted, and rummaging for a frying-pan was just off when Wharton, another of the men, stopped him.

"Don't you be a darned fool," he said. "Them charrin' red-hot vents ain't no cooking-stove. You git a change o' wind and you'll have steam at devil knows what heat in your face. It 'ud flay you alive, man. Clark—you be content with boilin' and steamin' and don't go getting fresh over bacon!"

Clark subsided, still grinning, and Wharton went off on his job of gas-collecting at a vent near by. For one of the objects of the expedition was to get samples of gas for analysis, no easy job when a change in the wind brings clouds of blinding steam and hot stifling gas about the man engaged on the job; and Wharton, with Clark, who was really a botanist but found himself without a job since all life in the valley was extinct, used language that matched the volcanoes' output for sulphurous qualities.

FOR the first week or two all went as well as the most sanguine could hope; then, one day, returning from a lengthy exploration of the Katmai crater, Napier, Washburn, Gene, and Hunter met a freshening north-east wind across the valley.

"This means the woollies'll visit us to-night," Hunter said, screwing up his eyes to stare at the distant clouds. "I reckon we'll shore the tent up a bit, General."

Napier, who was known simply by this term to everyone, nodded in confirmation, whereupon Washburn, seeing Gene's frown, explained the term.

"When it blows up here, which it does eight weeks out o' ten, they call it 'williwaws,' or 'woollies,'" he said. "North-westers on the Pacific side, north-easters this."

"D'you get bad storms, then?" Gene asked rather carelessly, being intent on something else, and both the Americans laughed as if his question were rather a joke than otherwise. Hunter adding:

"You'll see soon enough. You've never known wind I reckon—yet."

The remark was significant, and Gene was all the more interested to be told, on arriving at camp, to give a hand shoring up the two tents—three of the members of the expedition having gone further down to the camp nearer the base and beyond the entrance to the valley. Parr, with Wharton and Clark, was



strengthening the bigger of the two tents as, extremely tired, the four struggled up, and he wasted few words.

"We're in for a blow—Hunter, get those extra poles—Wharton, Hugon, get busy with lashing the whole lot up. General——"

"I'll attend to the second tent," Napier said. "I've seen these 'woollies.' " And presently, Gene, looking up from his work, saw that a heavy tarpaulin had been flung over the tent and buried in the ground on the windward side, with stones and mud piled about it.

"I should think that would stand anything!" he said, surveying it, and was surprised when Napier merely shrugged his shoulders.

As for the "grub" tent, as the bigger was called, the poles and braces sunk deep in the ground about it looked like a cage, lashed together with fully a thousand feet of rope, while all the guys had been secured to boulders as big as a man could move.

"What's the double thickness for?" Gene asked, puzzled by such over-elaborate precautions, for no wind on earth that he had ever known ought to damage the tent now. Wharton answered him bluntly.

"Keep the blasted pumice out," he growled. "Cuts a feller all to pieces. You're figurin' to laugh at such a lot o' trouble, ain't you?"

"I'm figurin' to see the wind that'll shift that tent!" Gene retorted, whereupon Wharton grinned.

"You'll see it!" he drawled, "'fore the night's through. Good an' plenty."

Supper was a hasty and rough affair, and each man crawled thankfully enough into his damp, warm blankets. Gene was very weary and heavy with sleep after his long, hard day, and was just dropping off to slumber when a tremendous blast whirled down the valley and struck the tent. It rather disturbed him,

and a minute or two later a second louder one came, whereupon, disgusted at being roused, he in turn disturbed Hunter who slept close by him.

"Think we ought to look outside?"

But Hunter was equally heavy.

"Oh, let it blow!" he yawned, and, turning over, dropped into a sound slumber, followed after a very few minutes by Gene.

He seemed to himself to have hardly slept a moment when he was awakened by a tremendous burst of sound which made the tent tremble, and instantly he was wide awake. For a moment, raising himself on his elbow, he could hear the great wind dying away down the valley, when all became quiet till another great gust boomed through the night.

The gale was still intermittent, but every blast increased in strength, and presently Hunter and Wharton both awoke and the three lay listening to the gathering tempest.

"Listen to that, will you?" Wharton said. And in the silence that had succeeded the last blow could be heard coming over the mountains a tremendous gust of roaring wind, increasing in force and noise as it tore nearer till it struck the tent with a force like that of a terrific explosion.

A sharp cracking and rending announced disaster and Hunter swore violently, for the poles were giving, and as they snapped tore great rents in the covering of the tent.

"It'll never stand," Wharton shouted. "Hell! This blasted stuff's like a needle!"

The outer cover of the tent had already gone when Napier and Washburn came crawling in.

"Ours is down, and Parr's rolled up in his bedding with the remnants on top of him!" Napier said in a moment's slight respite. "You others pack what you

can in your beds and load up with extra coats. The rain's coming in."

Wharton preferred to roll his bedding round him, for which later he was sorry, and suddenly, with a report like a pistol the inner cover, beaten and torn with the flying knife-edged pumice, ripped from top to bottom.

There were yells and curses as the drenching rain and hail of pumice drove in upon the crouching men, for the pumice was of all sizes with jagged razor-like edges that penetrated goggles, and drove right through the wind- and rain-proof coats.

"Get up together in the corner!" Napier shouted, trying to make himself heard above the yell of the wind, and the five men huddled together, dragging some of the torn canvas over them, arms about one another, cowering down, while wet pumice collected all over them, in hair and eyes, in noses and mouths, down their turned-up, buttoned-up collars, in their pockets and boots, even in their lungs as they breathed the finer dust.

"Will this bit of tent last till it's dawn?" Washburn asked of nobody in particular, and somebody—it sounded like Wharton—said:

"Why can't we bolt for it?"

A frightful blast struck the little heap under the straining, ripping canvas and rolled it completely over. Amidst a struggling heap of bodies, arms, and legs, a voice shouted:

"And go straight to hell down the nearest fumarole? Not for Archie, thank you!"

Despite the bruises, the tangle, the appalling discomfort, there was a general laugh, but soon the cold grew almost unendurable; and when at last a faint greyness showed dawn to be breaking. Hunter crawled from the general mêlée and peered round outside the thing called by courtesy a tent.

"We might make Urak Camp," he cried. "You

can just see, but we'll have to keep to the east side of the valley to avoid missing the ford of Knife Creek."

"Come on, then," Parr said. "Everyone try and salve something—the instruments have gone to glory, I'm afraid."

He had a little pocket flash-light, and by its aid they crawled about collecting what they could by the wreckage of the other tent, and Gene, very unwisely, rose to his knees and was a little way from the others when, as he braced himself against the wind, he suddenly found himself flying through the air.

Of all the experiences of danger and discomfort that he had ever known that was the worst. He felt like a man in a nightmare whirled through space, realising in a flash of thought that he might be blown bodily down one of the red-throated fumaroles. It seemed hours, it was perhaps but a few seconds, when with a scuffling thump he found his face in the mud, and his legs blown wildly over in a somersault. Clutching desperately at the ground, he managed to prevent himself being blown head over heels a second time, and for a minute he lay there, gasping, as his heart resumed its normal rate of beating; and clawing at the biggest rocks he could find, he saw dead ahead, not twenty feet farther on, the grey rushing smoke of a huge vent.

To remain where he was was worse than folly. At any instant he might be blown headlong into the chasm. To move was almost as certain a death, yet move he must, and by clutching and scratching with heels and bleeding fingers he wriggled to one side till the vent was no longer in front of him, and then, seeing a clear course ahead, risked standing, and, half running, half carried, sped on down the valley.

At the ford he found Parr and Washburn crouching in the lee of a great shelf of rock, and the creek being

a little under shelter, they managed to cross it and in record time completed the ten miles to Urak.

It was grey dawn when they reached the bigger camp there, no longer in the direct path of the storm, and thankfully enough did the drenched and exhausted men creep into the tents and the warm sleeping-bags which the others at once vacated.

All that day and part of the next night the gale continued, but before the morning it had blown itself out, and they were able to revisit the wreckage of their old camp, gather what scattered effects they could, and then proceed to establish a new camp in a spot more protected from the worst winds.

NAPIER and Washburn, with Hunter, had gone ahead to secure the data for a new topographical map, and it was arranged that they should return a fortnight later. They expected to find further manifestations of startling volcanic activity, and quite how startling that activity was to be no one of the expedition guessed.

For the first time since he had left Kodiak, Gene was restless that night when sleep should have come to him. The steam seeping up always through the ground made the atmosphere of the tents very like that of the hot room of a Turkish bath ; for they had all found that the bedding grew first damp, then wet ; that the steam penetrated everywhere, and that cameras, instruments, every kind of article soaked up moisture.

Previous experience of the marvellous valley had shown that the customary bugbear of explorers—rheumatism—was unknown while living there, that no chills were ever taken, or colds caught, and quite often the perpetual steaming proved a great comfort after a day's hard work in freezing wind and bitter rain. This night, however, Gene tossed and turned, vividly aware of the discomfort of being half boiled on the side next the earth and half frozen on the other, and his thoughts, released from the excitement of the last few weeks, ranged backward across time and place to the last year's happenings and the manor in southern England.

And as he thought, Phyllis seemed to come strangely near him, her presence become almost real ; the memory



of voice and face and gesture had never been more vivid. He wondered whether he were dreaming, for in the tiny steamy tent, with Hunter and Wharton close beside him, he was so conscious of her that he half raised himself on his elbow trying to pierce the darkness. The warm wetness of the steam-soaked bedding, the familiar gaseous, sulphurous smell, the distant roar and hiss of escaping steam and the thick blackness of the tent—all was real, tangible, yet in a curious way all was unreal. He was a thousand miles from civilisation, nearly ten thousand from England and Little Standingrydge, yet he was more certain of Phyllis's presence close beside him than that of the two men who slept but a foot or two away. He held his breath lest he should dispel the heavenly sense of rest that was stealing in upon him, his whole being cried out voicelessly to the beloved spirit that was speaking to him across half the world, and, lying there rigidly still, the assurance of her love and understanding and undying trust crept into his sore heart. As certainly as if her bodily self had been miraculously transported to his side he was sure of her real and spiritual presence here beside him in this desolate inferno of the remote northern land. Wordlessly her abiding love spoke to him, and passionately he responded. Whatever he had been, whatever he had done, or appeared to have done, she loved him enough to project her spirit to his through the timeless distances of space.

How long he lay there staring into the darkness, hardly daring to breathe lest the spell should be broken, he did not know; but after a while he became aware that she was no longer with him, for the tension of nerves and limbs suddenly relaxed, and with the cessation of mental strain came a tremendous physical reaction. He began to tremble violently, and the more he tried to control it the more it increased. His breath

came in gasps, his throat swelled and ached ; as a great wave sweeps sand barriers away, the rush of emotion swept away his control. Burying his head beneath the blanket he began to sob wildly, stifling the sounds till he was almost choked, fighting for self-control till he was rigid as iron, only to be convulsed the next instant with the storm that swept over his soul.

Hunter, a keen-eyed, handsome young Westerner, who had taken rather a fancy to his companion, roused from slumber to turn over, grunted, thus waking himself more completely, and was about to settle off once more when stifled sounds beside him startled him into wakefulness. He thought for a moment that someone was dreaming in a nightmare. Then, as sleep left his brain, he realised the truth and lay for a moment dismayed and startled. It was Hugon lying next him . . . he could hardly believe his ears . . . and feeling profoundly uncomfortable his first instinct was to turn over and go to sleep again as fast as he could. Some instinct, however, prevented him : he hesitated, tried to stare through the darkness. Then, given courage perhaps by reason of it, raised himself on his elbow and felt for Gene's shoulder, bending close down to him.

"Hugon—hold on—what the hell's the matter ? Hugon——?"

The whispered words were clumsy enough, but tone and touch were eloquent : and they did what unexpected sympathy so often does—destroyed the last semblance of Gene's self-control, whereupon Hunter dragged his companion close to him and held him with an arm gripped about his shoulders so that Gene's head was pressed against him, his face hidden on his breast.

He went hot all over afterwards thinking of it in the glare of daylight, but hidden in utter darkness it somehow seemed impossible to do otherwise than follow the instinct that bade him give his companion

something human and kindly to hang on to. He asked no questions. Gene recognised, even in the depths, the warm kindness that could just assure him of its sympathy and utter not one word of query ; and gradually the tempest passed and he could fight again for control and decency ; and presently Hunter spoke, hardly above his breath lest he should waken Wharton.

" That's better . . . there's a good chap . . ." as he would have spoken to a child ; and Gene, beginning to realise what had happened, put his hand up to the one that lay around his shoulder and gripped it.

" It's good of you," he whispered thickly. " I'm . . . I'm sorry I made such a . . . such a damned fool of myself. . . . I got thinking."

In the darkness Hunter nodded wisely.

" It don't do to think sometimes," he whispered back. " An' . . . this place kinda knocks all one's preconceived notions endways. Gets you down to rock-bottom. Anything I can do ? "

" No. Only . . . forget what an exhibition I've made of myself . . . if you can."

Hunter's reply was elliptical.

" Lost my wife last year—she was only twenty—the kid died too . . . next day. . . . There comes a time when if the whole world was lookin' on you just gotta play baby. I've been there. Hell ! What's that ? "

His voice broke sharply from a strangled whisper to a cry that was nearly a shout as a strange sound came down the valley. The dull, muffled sound of an explosion followed by a thundering detonation, distant yet distinct, the earth suddenly heaved beneath them.

They were out of their blankets in the instant, Wharton beside them, and, stumbling out of the tent,

stared through the darkness just as, with a shout of their names, the three others tumbled out of the other tent.

"Look up the valley! Look!" Wharton shouted, and there, away towards the unseen head of the valley, a red glare showed in the sky, lighting up the clouds and glowing mysteriously on the mountains; at the same moment came another of those mighty muffled sounds and the glare grew suddenly brighter, and a puff of wind sweeping down the valley brought on its bosom an unbearable smell of sulphur.

"An eruption!" Silton said hoarsely. "It's too far away for Katmai, or any of those we know. Good lord! where's the chief? It must be somewhere quite near him!"

The great glow in the north-west lit up their faces with a dull red light, and at Silton's words fierce anxiety entered their minds. Somewhere beyond the crests of the volcanoes that closed in the valley twenty-five miles away, Parr, Napier, and Washburn were camping, and wherever their camp was it must be very near the scene of the eruption.

"I'd no idea there was a volcano way over there," Wharton said, staring beneath frowning brows at the sullen sky. "We never found nothin' that way in 1917."

Somebody made some half-absent answer. Hunter said:

"Dawn's breaking!" and Gene plunged back into the tent to get the utensils for an early breakfast. His head ached, his eyes smarted, he felt furious and embarrassed; but even so he was aware that the dreadful tension of tightly-strung nerves had ceased, that in some way the strain was easier, and the blessed assurance of Phyllis's trust and love warm in his heart.

Hunter, who took charge of the camp in Parr's

absence, announced that three of the men were to return to the base camp on the seashore near the ruins of Katmai village, and the other two—Gene and Wharton—were to accompany him north-west to search for Parr, Napier, and Washburn. Breakfast was a hasty affair; the packing up for the return trip was left to Sifton and Baker, and the three who were going on got together their loads at express speed. The problem of transportation had been more than difficult to solve ever since the expedition of 1913, for no single blade of grass or bit of stick grew within the confines of the devastated region; pack-animals could not be landed from Kodiak through the surf, and, even if the risk of such a landing had been taken, there was no means of providing them with fodder once Katmai Pass was reached. So each man was pack-animal as well as scientist, and one and all worked nobly.

Hunter gave brief instructions as to the length of time the others were to remain at the base camp before crossing to Kodiak, should the search prove fatal to either Parr's party, or their own, or both, and soon after daybreak, he, Wharton, and Gene turned their faces to the dread darkness which hung in the north-west and started on their perilous quest.

They retraced much of their way towards the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes, but skirted the last slope of the pass, and turned eastward, for dead ahead was the dense darkness of a great ash-cloud, drifting slowly on a westerly wind, and to plunge into that would mean utter destruction for them all in one or other of the steaming fumaroles of the valley.

Eastward the sky was still light, and, led by Hunter, they made the best going they could along the foot of Mount Katmai, over ground which had been covered for many feet deep by the great mud-flow of 1912,



hindered repeatedly by fissures, sometimes only a few feet wide, and often a hundred feet deep, twisting and turning through the flow. It was often difficult to cross these fissures and meant a considerable *détour*, but they got on as well as could be expected, for the mud was hard, there was not much snow, and the light, though by no means strong, was sufficient for them to travel.

Parr and Napier had crossed the mountains to the east of the valley and were making a survey of the land immediately beyond where there might, or might not, be further manifestations of volcanic energy, and the eruption that had awakened everyone in the camp the night before was thought to be in the direction of Mount Martin, another volcano some miles beyond Katmai; but the darkness of the sky forbade any actual exploration in that quarter, and it was possible that Parr's party had got well out of the danger zone. Yet Gene could see how anxious Hunter was, for he pushed on at an exhausting speed, only allowing the briefest halt for food and rest.

"We've gotta distance that cloud, boys," he said, jerking his head in the direction of the great ash-cloud that blotted out more than half the heavens and was surely, but slowly, creeping towards them. "If we get cut off by that it may mean two days' darkness and no earthly chance of finding the boss. If we can keep our present pace up for another twenty-four hours we shall just cut across it and get out of range. Then we may be able to see what's blown itself up and know whether the rest of 'em is dead or alive."

Wharton, scanning the desolate landscape, shrugged his shoulders.

"Is there any single chance?" he asked. "Seems to me they'd be right in the middle of the whole show."



"They may just have got out of range. What a stink of sulphur!"

A puff of wind carried a sulphurous reek to them, and more ominous still the sound of distant thundering.

"Still at it!" Hunter ejaculated. "That's a volcano. Listen!"

They listened, straining their ears, and there came clearly enough the sound of distant thudding detonations some miles away, but ominous in conjunction with the sickly grey twilight and the bare desolation of the mud-flats around them. Dusted over the slope of the mountain-side opposite, as far as the eye could reach in the ghostly twilight were puffs of white steam rising from the vents that seamed it, and suddenly an immense horror of the whole place took hold of Gene.

The miles upon miles of country utterly laid waste, the absence of any living thing, be it blade of grass or animal—the insects that occasionally appeared at the mouths of fumaroles could hardly be accounted living in the sense he desired—the steam rising here and there from fissures leading to unknown depths, the sky so often overcast with cloud, and now hidden to east and north by an inky darkness that blotted everything from view save the great curve of mountain which they faced and the tumbled hilly country lying beyond—the silence broken only by those reverberations like distant thunder that seemed rather to shake the atmosphere than make any actual loud disturbance. It was all dreadful—an inferno of frightful desolation, of unreality, of unimagined evil power.

He glanced quickly at the faces of his two companions, wondering if they were experiencing anything of his own feelings; but Wharton was examining the sole of his foot, and Hunter staring ahead, brows frowning, lips compressed, and Gene jerked himself to his feet.

"Let's get on," he said harshly. "I'm frozen."

"Where're we making for?" Wharton asked as they resumed their loads—each carried a week's supply of food—"an' where was the boss's goal?"

"Ross River. Lies over there"—Hunter nodded in the direction. "He intended making for the head of the river and followin' it down to the sea. He's got an idea it bounds the district an' I think he's right. Anyway we've got to make for the river. If he gets there we'll find tracks. If we don't—well—time enough to talk."

Later, alone for a minute in the tiny tent they had for sleeping, Gene looked Hunter in the eyes.

"What chance have they got?" he said. "Tell me the truth."

Hunter held his glance for a minute.

"'Bout one in a hundred," he said. "They couldn't, to my way of thinkin', have got out of the danger zone. There's no doubt there's been an almighty blow-up somewhere t'other end of the valley—perhaps fifteen or twenty miles away. An' the boss was going to make the head of the valley before he turned east. We've got six days' supply of food. That means we gotta find them in three, for we'll be a darned long way off camp by the time we hit the river. That's all."

Such a lengthy speech from Hunter was a revelation, but the knowledge of his fears acted on Gene like a spur. The horror which had descended on him a few hours ago was still there, but he thrust it to the back of his mind. Somewhere, not many miles off, Napier and his gallant companions might be lying injured and helpless—while he could move he would search for them, and his last thought as he fell into the deep sleep of exhaustion was a determination not to return without them.

The next day dawned grey and cold, with a chill

wind sweeping across the mountains which made advance slow, and bit to the bone. It had the result, however, of staying the advance of the ash-cloud, which now lay partially behind them, and, for the next two days, they tramped in a dull, thick twilight, their hopes of finding Parr and his companions becoming fainter and fainter.

On the third day, their rations perilously low, Hunter spoke the word they dreaded to hear.

"It's no good going on. To get to the river we'd have to cross the Pass ahead, and in this weather, when the least change of wind would bring that black blanket of ash down on us, it would be just darned crazy. If we get going's hard as we can we'll just get back to camp 'fore they cross to Kodiak. If we don't . . ." he paused significantly—"we'll have twenty-four hours' marching an' no food—and what's worse we'll endanger the whole lot of 'em with this monster behind us breathin' fire and slaughter. You've both seen the glare of fire after dark, way back there, and you've both seen how all the volcanoes and vents are just bursting themselves a hundred times fiercer'n ordinary—it means big trouble, and my orders was to get away as quick as possible if the signs we've seen come along. An' they have. There's every chance that the whole district's boilin' up for another big eruption. So we start back soon's we've had half an hour's rest and a meal."

Neither man spoke for a moment. Each knew what Parr's last orders had been, and that Hunter had only spoken truth when he said Parr feared there was big trouble likely to come once again to the Katmai district. Had Parr come safely past the head of the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes before the eruption of which the ash-cloud was an ominous result, they should have come across his tracks by now. To take

the trail he should have used, and search for his party in the direction of the valley, would be utterly useless, for the whole horizon was hidden in thick darkness.

Silent, absorbed in their own thoughts, the three men set about their scanty meal, and presently Gene got up and tramped a little further on to look over a low ridge just beyond. His ringing shout brought the others up to him along the quarter of a mile slope at a run, and, unable quite to control his voice, he pointed along the long valley that lay ahead.

"Look at that—look at that!" he cried, and, following his arm, they saw a valley leading sharply away to the east, with a few tufts of rough grass and lupins pushing through the ashy floor; a narrow stream leapt from one of the rocky walls and ran swiftly along one side of the valley, which, sloping round the shoulder of a hillside, hid its widening mouth from view some twelve miles ahead. But it was evident it led away by an unexpected and easy route to the sea-coast. And there, not more than three miles distant, rather to one side of the level floor, a small tent.

For a moment they stared, incredulous, trembling with excitement. Then Wharton gave a yell; Gene echoed it, and Hunter slapped them both on the back: Parr was safe.

"Get back and pack up!" he exclaimed when their first moments of relief were over. "Then we'll make for 'em. Guess the boss is doing his survey work and chose the valley for shelter."

"He can't see the ash-cloud down there," Wharton said meditatively. "Mountain this side too high. If he did I'm figgering he wouldn't choose no valleys to camp in. They ain't too healthy 'bout here."

"Don't croak!" Hunter ejaculated. "Here, get back. We're not losin' any time now."

Half an hour saw them topping the ridge once more,

their packs strapped once again to their shoulders, and in single file over the rough ground they began to descend the hill-side. Two or three hundred yards farther on, coming round a bluff, they saw the valley extended, narrowing slowly up into the mountains behind them for several miles, and Gene paused, straining his eyes towards the twilight that hovered over the way they had come. Far away to the north-west there was absolute thick darkness; farther to the north the ash-cloud thinned; farther still the sky could be seen a faint yellowish-grey against which the dark outlines of the mountains were visible, and beyond even the mistiness was clearing, which showed the wind to be rising and driving the ashes away beyond the head of the valley of Ten Thousand Smokes.

The sky looked indeed as if the worst were over, but, even as he watched, Gene saw that from behind one of the distant ridges columns of blackish-yellow smoke were rising at a tremendous pace, shooting out from some hidden crater and mingling almost instantly with the outskirts of the great ash-cloud, showing approximately the source of the whole disturbance. He was just congratulating himself on even this distant glimpse, when something made him look at the upper reach of the valley beneath him, and looking he felt a sudden sinking horror as if a cold hand had clutched at his stomach. Wheeling round, he yelled to Hunter, who had gone a little ahead, and when Hunter clambered back demanding none too amiably what the hell he wanted, shook him by the arm.

"Look, man! Look at the valley! What is it—sand—mud?—it's moving!"

The glimpse they had of the valley was of a stretch perhaps five miles above the place where it debouched into the more open country, a distance difficult to estimate by reason of its tortuous course. But the



glimpse was enough. A torrent of incandescent matter, whether of mud or sand or water, capped with whorls of steam, glowing hideously against the rocks, was sweeping down the valley at fearful speed, filling it to almost its entire depth, and directly in its flow stood Parr's camp nearly a thousand feet below them and at least three miles away.

Just for a second the horror of the sight paralysed thought and action, then a groan burst from Hunter's lips, an oath from Wharton's; and as if the sound had loosed some iron grip that held his limbs in bondage, Gene began tearing at the buckles of his packstraps like a man possessed, and, as he saw the actions Hunter gave a great cry.

"God Almighty! You're not goin' down——"

"I sure am. Wharton—fire your gun—make 'em look!"

The last words were flung back from several yards distant as he leapt down the rough ground, Hunter and Wharton staring after him, whitening under the tan of exposure and hardship, Wharton swearing hideously in the emotion which gripped him.

"He can't do it!" Hunter said thickly, interrupting the other's stream of oaths. "Shut your mouth, Wharton—God help him!"

They turned to look, and could only see a seething cloud of steam along the valley's course lit up as if by white fire from that hideous incandescent flood, and turned again to watch that figure rapidly dwindling in its heroic effort.

As for Gene, his first thoughts were not very clear. The only fact of which he was certain was the fact that he must get to Parr, that he must save the men so unconscious of the dreadful fate approaching them.

He leapt down the rough hill-side, and how he kept his feet was a miracle; once indeed he stumbled badly,



but he was nearly on the level then and the stumble seemed to quicken his perceptions, awaken his brain to the full realisation of what he was doing.

The tent was still inconceivably tiny and far away, but once on the valley floor the going was more even, and he settled down into his stride in the mad race against death, his eyes fixed on the distant camp.

Once he cast a look behind—above the hills he saw a cloud of steam or smoke—and he did not look again. Ahead he could make out a figure come out of the tent, and guessed Wharton's revolver-fire had attracted attention. It had been a joke against Wharton all the way through that he refused ever to be parted from his gun. The idea that anything could be funny flashed oddly into Gene's brain, and on its heels came the thought of Phyllis—the memory of that night so short a while ago when the certainty came to him of her undying love and trust. Phyllis would understand . . . she would know that, even if the chances were a thousand to one against reaching the camp, he had to take the risk. Of that there could be no question. It was the sporting chance—the thing he had for so long been denied—she would understand. How breathing hurt his lungs . . . it almost seemed as if they were closing up . . . and that noise in ears and throat—he did not realise it was his own labouring heart and groaning gasps for breath—God in heaven let him get there . . . God . . . God. . . . It was Napier looking towards him—he was so near now that his face was clear. . . . With a last effort, stumbling to his knees and staggering up again, he pointed back the way he had come, a hoarse sound bursting from his straining throat.

"Get up . . . get out. . . !"

He saw Napier swing on his heel, and pitching on his face lay there, feeling as though heart and lungs would

burst, heedless in his physical agony even of the hideous death that was raging towards him ; then the moment's darkness passed and he felt Napier dragging at his shoulder.

"Get up, man—for God's sake—get up!" And, somehow, he did get up, clutching at the other's arm, and, eased a little even by that moment's stillness, was able to stumble across the space that lay between them and the racing stream of water. On its brink Napier paused. The steaming flood was in sight now round the bluff where Gene had left Hunter and Wharton, but if they were to climb the cliff above them Gene must have a minute or two's rest. Stopping as coolly as if he stood on the brink of an English river in a peaceful English meadow, Napier scooped up a double handful of water and held it to the other's mouth, and Gene, gulping it down, nodded his relief and gasped: "Get on"—and plunged after Napier into the raging little creek. The current was so strong that a minute or two was wasted in getting across without losing foothold, although the water was not two feet deep, and then, with never another look up the valley, they began their climb.

The rocks were crumbly, the footholds precarious, and already an advancing wave of heat from that incandescent torrent beat upon them ; with the speed of desperation they struggled upwards till, a hundred feet or so above the valley floor, Napier, trusting an insecure handhold, slipped, clutched in vain at the cliff face, and slid down. He was a little above Gene, and quick as thought Gene caught at his outstretched hands, and though the wrench nearly pulled his left arm from its socket, he held him till he found a firm foothold.

"Come on," he gasped, still steadying him, but Napier, clutching the cliff by instinct rather than

reason, seemed not to understand. The blood was running down from a cut on his forehead, and it was evident that in his fall he had given his head a blow that had partially stunned him.

The roaring torrent of tumbling rocks, steaming mud, and white-hot sand was not fifty yards away, and, though its height was far below them, its scorching gases must burn their life out. With a groan Gene dragged at his companion, but Napier, faint and dizzy, could hardly move . . . and at that instant, ten yards or so to the left, Gene saw the mouth of a little cave.

Napier was a big and heavy man, but Gene had the strength of desperation . . . somehow he dragged the fainting man up . . . flung him headlong into the icy darkness, stumbled and dropped across his legs, blocking the cave's mouth. He heard a roar of escaping steam and grinding rocks, buried his face in his arms, felt a searing anguish across back and legs, and knew no more.

A MONTH later the boat from Kodiak steamed into the wonderful harbour of Vancouver, and on its deck, lying in the only canvas chair the boat—principally given over to cargo—possessed, was Gene. There was still a bandage round the right side of his head, and if he walked he walked with the slow uncertainty of weakness, but the worst of his illness was past. He had known practically nothing after that last dreadful climb. Nights and days had been one long nightmare of hellish pain and fever and ceaseless movement when every nerve cried out for rest. Once or twice a face he knew seemed vaguely to float before his eyes; once or twice a voice would penetrate the clouds that dulled every faculty save that of suffering. The journey to the base camp, the tossing across the strait to Kodiak, the three weeks spent there while the fight for his life was waged—all was utterly unknown to him, save the torture of pain and movement, and not till the boat had passed Seymour Narrows and entered the more placid waters of the Strait of Georgia did he begin to exhibit signs of returning health. The August weather was calm, the water like glass reflecting the beauties of forest and mountain, and Gene, as soon as he could stagger, lay on deck watching the panorama. He talked very little, for he still felt too ill to find companionship stimulating, but the long, quiet hours and the sweet freshness of the air could not but heal both body and mind. His splendid constitution stood

him in good stead, saving him from the blood-poisoning they had all feared, and, once the burns were healed, he began to recover strength. Napier, coming across the deck as the boat came within sight of Vancouver, gave him a cigarette and sat down on a coil of rope.

"We shall get our mail here," he said casually and pretended not to see Gene's start. "My wife has probably written every other day, not guessing how long it would be before I could get the letters. Funny how the Fraser water keeps so exact an outline, isn't it?"

He was looking away to starboard where the muddy waters of the great river stained the blue salt water a light brown, the division between the two being as sharply defined as if it had been drawn with a pencil.

Gene nodded. The thought of letters, possibly from England, set his pulses thudding and a hot flame racing through his veins; he was still too weak to control the physical expression of any mental excitement, and the Fraser's peculiarity was rather a relief to him conversationally.

"Very. They don't mingle at all. What an amazing harbourage Vancouver has—thousand pities they can't grub up all the burnt stumps and trunks of the firs, isn't it? That headland on the right—now——"

He indicated the high bluff that juts out to the south of the town where the Marine Drive skirts the coast for twenty miles, and then turned his attention to the northern boundary where the Douglas firs run down thickly to the sea from the snow-line and the Lions lie couched against the blue of the sky.

"We shall be in about four," Napier said, surveying through narrowed eyes the lovely harbour beyond Stanley park, where the tide rip runs fiercely between the primeval forest and the northern shore. "We'll

stay at the hotel for a few days till you feel fit to make plans for the future."

Gene nodded again. He had realised for the last two or three days that such plans must be made, but the thought was distasteful. The last three months with its excitements, its hardships, its constant occupation had kept thought fairly well at bay; but now the expedition was over, its members already scattering, and his own future was still undecided.

For almost the first time he regretted the money that placed him beyond the need of work. Had food and lodging depended upon his own exertions he would have soon found occupation unremitting enough to drown indecision and brooding; but now, when he had enough to indulge any caprice that happened to enter his mind, he was undecided and wretchedly depressed.

Napier's voice, a little deeper than usual, cut across his unprofitable musings.

"I've never mentioned it yet, Gene, but I suppose you know that you saved my life that day? Not only in taking the appalling risk of warning me, but of dragging me up to the little cave and sheltering me with your own body. We haven't forgotten because we've not spoken of it . . . I shan't forget. And I've a proposition to make."

Supremely uncomfortable Gene threw his cigarette away, flushing scarlet and fidgeting.

"Oh, go to hell, Napier," he said. "I don't want to hear about it. Anybody would have done the same."

A queer little smile played about Napier's mouth for a moment.

"You're singularly true to type, Gene. Go to hell yourself, my friend, so long as you listen to me for five minutes first."



He glanced up, met Gene's sulky look, and laughed ; but he laid one hand on his knee and kept it there.

" My wife is extremely anxious to buy a place over here or in the States, but I don't know enough of the country to do what I always intended to do if I stayed in England. And that's—farm. Now, I saw a place not so very far from New York when I was there in April that took my fancy. Not very big, but just what I want. I've decided to buy it on the condition that you'll run it for me for the first three years. Wait a moment. I don't want an answer till to-morrow, or the next day, and I want you to know just what you're up against. The place has been let go badly. It wants replanting, reforesting in places, stocking, and altogether putting right. I've not got unlimited means, as you know, and half the purchase money will be my wife's. I'm making you the offer because you know the country pretty thoroughly and I want, ultimately, to make the place pay. In fact it's got to. And if I try and run it at first . . . well . . . it would simply mean bankruptcy. It will be responsible work and pretty arduous at first, and as to terms—you can settle that when you've thought it over. It's a business proposition and it's got to be carried through on that basis."

He waited for no answer at the end of one of the longest speeches he had ever made in his life, but got up and strolled away, lighting his pipe, leaving Gene to stare after him in amazement. His first impulse had, very naturally, been to refuse, since he suspected Napier's motive to be gratitude, but the last sentences had counteracted that impression. He remembered Mrs. Napier talking of her desire to live part of the time in the States, and her mention of her husband's desire to own a farm. If Napier really desired a capable manager to put a small farming estate in

order and start it on a successful career, then he, Gene, could do it better than most. His experience of the Eastern States was less recent than that of the Middle West, but even so he knew them and he knew both the climate and the possibilities of such a place. He had no desire to go back to England. Donnisthorpe held now for ever memories that were of undying beauty and undying pain. If he wished to do anything, ever, with his life again, he must cut loose from all that reminded him of those months of happiness; must take hold of the ragged strands of life left to him and weave them into a new pattern. And for that it was best to keep away and take up some definite work which, entailing responsibility, could not be dropped at will.

The boat, passing the narrow bottle-neck of the tide-rip, steamed into the great inner harbour and the city came into view, beneath a cloudless sky—its buildings, its wharves, its docks, its shipping—a welcome contrast to the northern desolation of the last few months.

When they had tied up beside the quay Hunter came up to Gene, his handsome face expressing lively disgust.

"I didn't reckon on you gettin' off here, Hugon. Thought you were coming on to Seattle."

"No. I'm staying here a few days. Then I shall be off to the East. Where shall you be?"

"Back at 'Frisco for a while till something else turns up. If it doesn't I shall get back to my home up in the Canyon country. 'F ever you come back to Flagstaff, look me up. Anyone'll tell you."

"I sure will!" Gene said, gripping the outstretched brown hand. "I shall be round there before long, I expect. Canyon draws me . . . but I've got to get to the East for a while. Good luck, old chap."

Ten minutes later he got on shore leaning on a stick

and Napier's arm, to be brought up short by a woman's grey-clad figure and hear a quick :

"Bob! Mr. Hugon! Oh, my dears—how—good to see you both again!"

Napier uttered an exclamation, and Gene, wrenching his arm away, went slowly and rather uncertainly ahead. He had not bargained for Mrs. Napier's presence in Vancouver, and he knew that had he and Phyllis just been united after a three or four months' absence he would by no means desire a third person's company.

He hailed a taxi before there was any chance of them overtaking him, drove up to the hotel, booked a room, and, quite exhausted after such unwonted exertion, retired to it and flung himself on the bed to think.

Napier's offer, if accepted, would at least provide him with an object for his days, would give him settled work for a time. Later, it would be possible, no doubt, to plan some more definite occupation. It was odd to feel handicapped by physical weakness; odd and humiliating. . . . The last time he had been ill had been when a broncho kicked him down Santa Ana way. . . . Alma had kept his enforced idleness lively with the noisy, hard-drinking outfit that frequented the collection of shacks that called itself a town, ten miles from the city. He uttered a short laugh as he realised the scenes that had taken place, a laugh in which mirth had no place, and then remembered what Napier had said about the mail. Some should, surely, be awaiting him from his New York lawyers, and the thought set him on his feet once again and down to the big vestibule of the hotel, where he found his idea justified, and a small packet of letters ready for him. He took them and was on his way to the elevator when he met Napier, no longer the roughly dressed giant he had known for nearly four months, but a suave man

of the world once more, dressed in unmistakably English grey tweeds, black tie, and black-lined white shirt, clean-shaven but for his short moustache; and seeing Gene, he stopped abruptly.

"My wife wants you," he said. "You gave us the slip at the docks. She's waiting in our sitting-room."

He seemed to take it for granted that Gene would come, and Gene, carried back to the world he had once known so well, had no thought of refusing. His forced physical reliance on himself seemed to have brought him farther along the path of convalescence, and he accompanied Napier to the sitting-room where Mrs. Napier stood by the window looking down on to the level turf of the ground around the back of the hotel. At the sound of their entrance she turned, said: "You've brought him!" and coming across to Gene, took his two hands in hers, held them for a minute, then lifted her own to his shoulders, and drawing down his head, kissed him.

"I have no words to thank you for what you did, my dear," she said, a little unsteadily, and turning again, went back to the window and her survey of the lawn.

Gene, utterly taken aback, went first red, then white, and Napier, pushing him into a chair, crossed to the side-table and busied himself with siphon, whisky, and glasses, returning to say:

"Have a drink, Gene? I ordered dinner for the three of us here at half-past seven."

"I've no clothes to dine with anyone," Gene said abruptly. "Most of my stuff is in New York."

"That doesn't matter," Beatrice Napier said, voice and eyes once more under control. "Bob's things won't fit you, worse luck, so he can't offer to lend any to you, but you can get linen here and I suppose a good tailor."

"I'll telegraph New York," Gene said, relieved at the resumption of ordinary behaviour, and swallowed the remainder of his whisky-and-soda at a gulp. "Unless you're not staying on here?"

"For a fortnight at least," Beatrice Napier retorted. "You see, I want to explore the beauties of this place a little and introduce Bob to the most heavenly bathing in all this wide world. And we hope"—she smiled at him very charmingly—"we hope you'll stay with us. You're not quite strong again yet, and we want you."

Gene felt his irritability of temper and general unease vanishing. After all the journey to New York in the heat of early September was not greatly to be desired. Vancouver's glorious surroundings called for appreciation, and he was no good to anyone, least of all himself, until he grew strong.

It was an effort to accept the invitation, because acceptance meant a certain conventionality of behaviour which he felt disinclined for; but ungraciousness would be unpardonable in the rather peculiar circumstances, and he made himself thank Beatrice Napier and arrange to stay; after which he went to his room to make what toilet he could for dinner, and once alone opened his letters in feverish anxiety. Several were unimportant, then tearing open a re-addressed one from his lawyers his heart stood still, for the handwriting was that of Phyllis.

For a moment he shook so that he could not open it and sat rather precipitately on the edge of the bed as the room swam round him. Then he tore the envelope open and stared at the written page.

It blurred before his eyes and he rubbed his hand impatiently across them, lifted it nearer and read the first two words: "My dearest"—caught his breath in a gasp that was nearly a sob and feverishly read on. The



letter was very long, very definite, very beautifully frank and honest, and when he had read it through the tears were running down his face and he sat staring unseeingly at the pages. She loved him and trusted him even as that vision of her had told him, but between them rose Alma's personality—Alma's undisputed legal right to him. Whatever the position, one thing was clear. For the present he was Alma's husband, and until that tie was broken they must not, could not, be together. At first the knowledge that she still loved him was utterly sufficient. Ever since the night in the desolate Alaskan valley he had believed, but now he knew; and knowledge is more comforting than faith when the love between a man and a woman is called into question. But gradually he began to think—saw the letter was dated two months previously, realised that she must be suffering under the tormenting silence, and began to see what the position really was. Still the divorce must surely be easy to hurry through; it was inconceivable that Alma should wish to delay matters since she had never pretended to care for him and had more money than she had ever dreamed of possessing—and seeing the last letter was the lawyers', he opened it and read it quickly through.

What was this? Alma did not intend—refused to entertain the idea of instituting proceedings—dazed by legal phrasing he reread the letter, then let it drop to the floor and stared at it. So that was her game? That her return for his desertion of her nearly nine years ago . . . injured, innocent Alma!

Quite suddenly he began to laugh, and he laughed till he was weak and shaking and panting for breath, laughed till he was gasping hysterically—and only subsided into silence through utter exhaustion.

He hardly realised the time when at last he remembered his dinner engagement, and Beatrice Napier



gave her husband one quick look as he entered, seeing a very different man to the one for whom she had waited. That man had been still weak and rather shy and embarrassed, almost boyish; this man's eyes glittered, his mouth was a grim line. He seemed to have shed his weakness like a cloak, and for the first time in her life she realised what the expression "to see murder" in a man's face may mean.

Dinner was pleasant because both host and hostess made it so, and though Gene, his thoughts now dwelling upon the beloved letter from Phyllis, now reverting to the information from New York, was in no enviable temper, he was sensible enough of their real regard for him to hide his alternations of feeling and do his best to respond.

His first action the next morning was to send a lengthy cable to Phyllis and write her a letter, and it was luncheon time before he had finished the latter and mailed it, and was ready to enjoy the new surroundings and the beauty of the day.

Late that evening he gave his answer to Napier, accepting the latter's offer.

LONDON lay under a pall of dun-coloured cloud, sweltering in September heat, and Phyllis, who had been lunching with her grandmother, arrived at Victoria in no very amiable frame of mind. Mrs. Chalmington was in one of her severest moods, and was critical even of her favourite granddaughter, and Phyllis, tired and dispirited, showed less respect for the old lady's opinions than usual. Mrs. Chalmington had never approved of Phyllis's engagement to Gene, and when it was broken so abruptly and for such a reason came down to Little Standingrydge about a month later and soundly scolded her granddaughter. She was furious too with Cathleen, but Cathleen never had tolerated interference from the members of her family and gave back quite as good as she got. But Phyllis, labouring under the double shock, was too stunned to retort and suffered comment, question, indignation almost in silence, and only her absolute determination not to give way saved her from a breakdown.

This particular Friday after some shopping she was to meet Cathleen, who was coming down for the week-end, and having arrived at the station early, surveyed the bookstall, bought the first edition of one of the evening papers and was idly glancing through it when a headline relating to the Alaska Expedition caught her eye. She had learned earlier in the summer that Gene had joined General Napier, but so far had heard no word from him, and this was the first authentic report

published in the press. The expedition was of interest to scientists the world over and had aroused widespread comment, and once or twice scanty news had reached the public by way of the wireless at Kodiak. But now a report was published giving copious details, and when Cathleen arrived at the station twenty minutes later the bill-board carried headlines referring to it and the later editions all had paragraphs on the subject. She came across to Phyllis, who, standing in the middle of the platform, was reading absorbedly quite impervious to pushes and growls, and spoke excitedly.

"Leon is with me. Met me outside the station, Phyllis! Have you seen the latest? Look!"

She thrust a paper under her nose, pointing to a paragraph, and Phyllis, her heart thumping, read the lines:

"That the Expedition did not end in disaster and the death of its three most prominent and noted members, was entirely owing to the heroic conduct of one man. A further eruption having occurred, he took his life in his hands and crossed the path of the advancing white-hot lava in order to warn his chief, who some miles away was unconscious of the approaching doom. Mr. Hugon was very seriously burned and for several days his life was despaired of."

"There!" Cathleen cried. "Oh, my dear, I'm so glad! I knew Gene had the right stuff in him. Here's Leon. Let's get a carriage to ourselves if we can, and talk."

Five minutes later when the train pulled out her wish was granted, and Leon admitted that he had been down to the newspaper offices to find out if they knew any further detail. His attitude over the whole affair had been peculiar, for at first he had been furious, as was only to be expected; then, quite suddenly, his whole attitude changed and he said no word, expressed no

opinion, refused to discuss Gene or Gene's affairs with any member of the family.

To-day was the first time he had mentioned his name for months, but Cathleen's unusual eagerness would brook no silence and everyone wished eagerly for the next morning's news. The oppressive humidity was left behind with the great city, and though it was still hot there was a faint breeze when they alighted at their journey's end and found Judy and Angela with the brown pony-cart, Ronnie and old Nannie with the small step-brother, who at nine months was a lovely golden-haired, dimpled thing extremely friendly with the world. The car waited too, but the children clamoured to drive some grown-up, so Nannie and her charge and Ronnie changed into the car, Phyllis and Cathleen taking their places. They drove the four miles at a steady trot, through the dreamy peace of the afternoon, the hedges already showing gleams of scarlet and gold, the berries thick on every bush, tangled trails of feathery wild clematis and honeysuckle—the latter nearly over—festooning from bush and bramble. The sky was cloudless, but pale, the distance softened by blue haze, and the humming of a thrashing machine from some farm came to the ears as the brown pony trotted almost noiselessly through the thick dust of the lanes.

It was Judy's fifteenth birthday, and though for the nine months since Joyce's death Little Standingrydge had been a quiet and saddened house for children, to-day Hugh had put his own grief aside and determined to make the day a happy one for her. He had given her the choice of an old-fashioned "party"—games, tea, more games, and much noise, from four to seven—or a really grown-up dance to which she might ask school-friends, cousins and the like—up to the number of twenty couples; and since Judy was frantically

longing for those glorious days when she should be "out," she chose the dance, and was consequently in a wild state of delight, hiding it as well as she could in her endeavour to be suitably grown-up.

Not wishing to talk about it lest Cathleen should make one of her cutting remarks, she therefore, after much mind-searching, hit upon a safe bromide.

"It's going to be an early winter," she remarked, with a great air of wisdom—"look at the berries! Are you enjoying living in London, Cathleen? No fields and gardens or horses and cows."

"Not very much," Cathleen said, with a grimace. "But it has to be put up with."

"Why don't you live in a cottage down here?" Angela inquired. "Daddy would give you one."

"Daddy needs all his cottages," Cathleen retorted. "And it's a very different thing living in the country in a cottage or in a place like the Manor, my dear."

"Isn't your husband rich, then?" was Angela's next question, whereupon Judy said:

"Don't be so personal, Angela!" and Phyllis added:

"Mr. Wildringham's work keeps him in town."

As for Cathleen she said nothing at all, but Phyllis noticed fine lines at the corners of eyes and mouth which had not been there before, and the sight distressed her. Cathleen had been difficult always, but she had been rather splendid over the unhappy results of her ill-advised marriage, and Phyllis hated to see those signs of strain in one whose bearing, if a trifle truculent, was always gallant.

She took a cigarette from her case now and lit it, apparently quite uninterested in anything Judy might say, and silence fell, for Angela was puzzling over the subject of Wildringham and his peculiarity in wanting to live in a town when he might be in the country, and Judy was absorbed in thoughts of her own, thoughts

in which Maurice and Gene Hugon were oddly mingled, for the memory still stayed with her of that evening when she had heard that quarrel, if such it could be called, in the hall at Little Standingrydge.

Passing a pretty little farm-house standing back from the road, Cathleen jerked a hand towards it.

"What happened about old Sims's precious right of way that Sir Abel closed?" she asked. "I've often meant to inquire."

"Hugh went to see Sir Abel and persuaded him to leave it. Technically he had everything on his side, for it wasn't a right of way at all, but he was very fair and sensible about it. Didn't understand the tenacity of the English peasant—that was all. Sims died a few months ago, poor man, and his son has the farm, and is a very nice young man and one of the best tenants Hugh has."

The subject sufficed to keep conversation afloat as it were till the Manor gates came in sight, and there they were greeted with yells of derision by Ronnie, who had been home over half an hour; and Phyllis entered the cool, wide hall to see on the table a telegram lying conspicuously awaiting her. With a murmured, "Your own old room, Cathleen," she picked it up, found it to be a foreign cable, and, suddenly feeling unable to bear any eye watching her, went on to the outer step of the porch and, standing there, read its message.

"Expedition successful. Arrived Vancouver to-day. Am with the Napiers. Found your dear letter waiting. Have answered it. I love you with all my heart and soul. God bless you. Next address in letter. Gene."

The garden, level green and blazing flowers, swung about her as his room had swung round Gene, and she clutched at the lintel of the door, drawing her



breath in gasps as if she was going to cry ; and when grass and trees and sky steadied themselves once more she lifted the flimsy slip and rested it against her face, unable even to frame in words the pæan of thanksgiving that rose in her heart.

Judy fifteen minutes later came and knocked at her door.

"Tea's ready—and daddy's tremendously excited over the report about the expedition to Alaska. Be quick. Why"—as Phyllis opened the door the younger girl stared at her—"Phyllis! What is it? Your eyes are just like stars!"

The compliment was so sincere that Phyllis blushed adorably, then bent and kissed Judy and with an arm through hers accompanied her along the corridor.

"I have just had a cable from Gene," she said as quietly as she could ; "he is safely back in Vancouver."

Out in the garden in the very spot where, sixteen months ago, she had sat thinking over the announcement of Hugh's marriage, tea was waiting. Hugh himself with the evening paper, Leon leaning over the back of his chair, her uncle Hilary at his side. Cathleen standing close by, a vivid figure as usual in a frock of her favourite orange, was listening to what he read, and Maurice idly smoking appeared to be the only one not interested. At her appearance Hugh looked up.

"You've seen this?" he asked. Then, without waiting for an answer: "Good heavens! What's happened?"

"I've had a cable from Gene," she said, repeating the words she had spoken to Judy ; "he's back in Vancouver with the Napiers."

There was a general outcry, a host of questions, even Hugh showing excitement, but it was to Hilary Chalmington Phyllis turned with sudden outstretched hands.

"You always believed in him!" she said impulsively, and lifting her face kissed him.

Hilary put his arm round her.

"Yes," he said, "I always believed in Gene—from the very beginning. Hugh loved him more, perhaps—and consequently he was the more bitterly disappointed and hurt when Gene got mixed up with that tragic affair than I was. But my belief in him never wavered—from that day to this."

There was a moment's silence; even Hugh had never heard his brother speak so emphatically of the man whose foolishness and sins had affected so many lives, and he felt an odd little pang of misgiving. He had indeed loved the boy very dearly through all his stormy youth, and had been only too willing and anxious to stand by him in the tragedy of his downfall. That, owing to his own desperate illness, had been impossible, and by the time he was about again Gene had left England. Maurice's voice interrupted his unhappy memories.

"You are a very loyal friend, Uncle Hilary. Hugon is lucky to have such a champion."

Hilary Chalmington, walking across the grass to his chair, stopped suddenly and looked at his eldest nephew.

"I am glad you appreciate it," he said quietly, and passed on to the chair that was put for him in the shade of the chestnut tree.

Leon, cigarette in hand, moved with sudden restlessness; was it his fancy or was there a certain curious emphasis in the elder man's tone? He experienced again that strange sensation of keeping something at bay, of fighting off some foreboding that threatened to leap into conscious knowledge—the little scene, unnoticed by the others, had for him an unpleasant significance.

"I confess my faith wavered—when he bolted,"

Hugh said reflectively. "I was never quite sure . . . at least . . . I suppose I was when I gave my consent to Phyllis's engagement to him. Yes, of course I was. And, by Jove, I'm glad he's done so splendidly!"

"Doesn't say anything about that awful girl, Alma, does he?" Cathleen asked, in much the same tone as she would have used in discussing an awful hat. "What a rotten shock it must have given him when his lawyers had declared she was dead, four years before! If he didn't kill the first girl, he certainly ought to have killed the second. I would have gladly helped . . . the frozen limit, wasn't she? You might *begin* to give us tea, Phyllis, my dear, even if you have heard at last from Gene."

"How sick Mrs. Daltry will be!" Leon chuckled suddenly. "She was so virtuously delighted over the smash. I should like to telephone to her. No, on second thoughts, I'll come over to church to-morrow to Wrexford if you'll give me lunch afterwards, Uncle Hilary. He's churchwarden, isn't he? And I shall be bound to see her."

An arrangement he was destined not to keep.

Judy's guests were to arrive at half-past eight—the cousins from Wrexford, Gerry and Pamela, two boy-friends from Winchester, three or four school-friends who were to stay the week-end, and a fair sprinkling of grown-up friends asked by Hugh to please her, several people from town, Norah and Hilary and the Napier girl who also was to stay over the Sunday, a tall slim, black-eyed, black-haired beauty who had been for some years a friend of both Cathleen and her cousin Pamela. The evening was very still and warm, the garden lit here and there by fairy lights, and though the only band was the gramophone and the little party was of necessity in the circumstances quite informal, everybody enjoyed themselves to the full; only Leon

at intervals found his thoughts recurring to that incident at tea-time and occasionally discovered himself watching Maurice. Maurice, however, one stick discarded, seemed in unusually good spirits, and—perhaps for Judy's sake, since he was devotedly fond of her—proved himself a very charming companion and, in some sort, host, for Hugh found entertaining, even in so small a way, rather painful and kept himself somewhat apart from it.

Judy, slim and tall in a straight frock of white satin, loosely girdled with silver, long slim white legs, dark curls, and cheeks and eyes aflame with excitement, was a charming sight to see, and when about twelve, in deference to their youthful hostess, the last guest departed, she went to bed saying it was the most wonderful day of her life.

As for Phyllis, weary as she was, she was too happy to sleep and lay wide awake watching the silent stars, a faint breath of the woods and gardens stirring in the room, the occasional sleepy twitter of a bird, or the hoot of an owl, alone breaking the dreaming silence of the night. For the time being nothing else mattered but the certainty of Gene's love. Whatever barrier rose between them she felt she could find courage to bear it so long as that blessed assurance continued, and peace descended for the first time for many weary months upon her tired spirit. She had endured long and bravely, and no one but herself knew how close she had been very often to disaster ; but now the relief, while exquisite to her mind, was exhausting to her body and she felt a passionate desire for sleep while sleep was yet far distant. She dropped off at last to be awakened to all seeming but a moment later by Judy, who was standing beside her bed, a slim, white-clad figure bare of head and shivering a little.

“ Phyllis ! Phyllis ! Wake up ! ”

Startled instantly into wakefulness, Phyllis sat upright.

"What is it? What's happened? Judy! Is the house on fire?"

"No. It's Maurice. I can hear him. . . . I think he's ill again."

"Maurice?" In an instant Phyllis was out of bed. "Get me my dressing-gown. That's right . . . darling, can you go to the kitchen and see if there's any hot water? Do you mind? If not, wake Leon—but not Hugh—and then go to bed."

Judy sped away through the sleeping house, and Phyllis hurried noiselessly along the corridor to Maurice's room, listened for a moment outside the door, and then, satisfied as to the truth of Judy's report, went in.

The blinds were up, the window was wide open, the light was turned on and Maurice lay on his back in bed, his face ghastly, his forehead wet. At sight of his sister he tried to smile, but the effort was beyond him.

He had a drug to take, but as Phyllis went to a drawer to get it he panted out:

"I've had it. No good," and fell back with an irrepressible groan.

She had seen him in his attacks before, but this was evidently more serious than those others, bad as they had been; the drug had never before failed to act, and such a failure dismayed her.

The sweat was glistening on his forehead, his hands lay limp and relaxed along the coverlet, and his eyes were dreadful as the grinding agonies strengthened. Swiftly she bent over him.

"I'm going to get Leon," she said, speaking quickly and clearly, "and he shall telephone for Dr. Ryle to come and give you morphia. I won't be a moment, dear."



Outside the door she found Judy, white-faced and shivering, sent her to waken Leon and took the kettle of hot water back into Maurice's room, finding Leon at her side a moment later as she was preparing the hot fomentations. The recurring attacks of inflammation to which he had been subject ever since his accident were usually brought on by over-fatigue or strain, but recently they had become more frequent and more severe ; and Phyllis had worried over them, for there seemed no reason for such an increase of pain or, rather, of its cause. And it was soon very evident that this was no ordinary attack ; for in spite of the drug he had taken and the hot fomentations about the inflamed hip and spine, Maurice grew rapidly worse.

Dr. Ryle was out at a confinement ; a message should be sent and the morphia sent over by car if he permitted, the sleepy servant had telephoned when Leon rang up the house, and in the circumstances there was nothing more to be done. Maurice grew delirious at last, only conscious of the dreadful pain that racked him, knowing nothing of his surroundings. It seemed to him that Gene ought to be with him—if Gene would only come he felt he could bear the pain for the few hours that remained to him. . . . Gene who had found him in that room . . . why would he not come ? . . . this pain was damnable enough . . . and it was all because he had sworn not to tell the truth. . . . If he might tell . . . if he might . . . “ for God's sake, let me tell them ! I can't go on. . . . I tell you I can't go on . . . anyway Irene broke it off—perhaps she guessed. . . . Don't pull his mouth so . . . you'll spoil his temper, you damn' fool . . . no, he'll take it all right . . . won't you, beauty ? Like a bird . . . let me tell them the truth. . . . Toni . . . so you don't think I ought to see her again when I'm engaged



to Irene . . . Toni . . . Toni's a good sport. . . . Toni . . . Toni ! "

The voice rose to a sharp cry ; then sank once again to an unintelligible mutter, and across the bed Phyllis's eyes and Leon's met in a swift glance, then avoided each other's look as Maurice moved restlessly and groaned with pain.

" Gene "—his voice was a whisper now, hoarse and slow—" Gene—I can't stand it—I can't stand it—Gene . . ." then fell away to silence in which the merciful delirium passed and he grew conscious once again of torturing pain.

" Leon . . . this "—the words were hardly audible—" this hurts like hell ! "

Thrusting back the suggestion that crowded into his brain, fiercely refusing to think of the meaning of those incoherent wanderings, Leon bent over him.

" Ryle's on his way—he'll be here very soon." And Phyllis, realising the uselessness of further disturbing him with the fomentations that did no good, went over to the window, and, drawing aside the curtain, looked out.

Dawn was breaking ; the outlines of the trees were shadowy, but palpable against the dove-grey east, a half-moon pale and wan lay low in the south-west, and the air was fresh and cool as it stirred the leaves ; across the silence came the distant sound of a car rapidly driven, and hearing it she dropped the curtain, said : " He's here ! " and quitting the room ran down-stairs through the silent house.

Dr. Ryle, heavily built, lumbered out of his two-seater, saw Phyllis in the doorway, took her hand between his and patted it.

" There, there, my dear ! You look like a little ghost—so Maurice is ill again. Poor fellow ! "

He was discarding coat and hat, selecting certain

things from a bag and putting them in another, and, as he spoke accompanied her up the stairs.

"You say he was in remarkably good spirits—the attack started after he retired—presumably suddenly. Yes . . . is your father up?"

"No. If possible I don't want to disturb him. His room faces the other way—he wouldn't hear you arrive—I dread another night-shock for him——"

"Quite so. Well, we'll not wake him unless we must. Now, my dear, I'll make an examination and let you know——"

He passed into the room, the sounds of Maurice's low, ceaseless moaning coming to their ears as the door opened; then, for a little while released from responsibility, Phyllis went back through the swing door to the upper hall, and sought the nursery wing, where amidst the happy pleasant things of a baby's life she pushed open the window very noiselessly and sank down on the broad window seat. She was physically so weary that she felt exhausted, her heart ached for Maurice, her nerves revolted from the memory of the suffering she had witnessed and not been able to alleviate; yet, deep beneath all, welling up from the depths of her being was a joy nothing could kill. Gene was hers. He knew of her trust in him; despite all that separated them he was given back to her—was hers more nearly than he had ever been before.

Longing for fresh air drove her from the room, downstairs, through the hall with its half-burnt candles, its débris, the dead flowers, glasses left about—all the litter of a dance before the domestic working of the house clears away the signs of over-night revels—out through the open door to the cool shadow of the garden, changing now from pearl-grey to faint blue, even as the east was brightening with lines of fire drawn finely along a dove-blue heaven.

It was too early even for the birds, although once or twice a sleepy chirp came from some hidden leafy fastness, and, drawing in great breaths of the cool sweet air, Phyllis prayed as she had never prayed before for Maurice's life.

A new day, dawning over fields and woods or upon the heaving distance of the ocean, remains for ever as something unspoiled, apart, holy ; a miracle ever repeated, coming straight from the Hand of God Himself ; and Peter Ryle, coming down from that room of pain, stood for a minute or two beside his car looking towards the growing splendour of the east, his tired eyes reflecting something of its wonder as he gazed, his lips moving almost soundlessly :

“ ‘ And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes ; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain.’ ”

And all the journeyings of spiritualists, all the discoveries of science, all the definitions of great intellects, and all the excursions into the world beyond the Veil, can give no more beautiful revelation of the Life Everlasting, with which to comfort the aching hearts of men.

" I SHOULD like a second opinion," Peter Ryle said, drinking the coffee Phyllis had insisted on making him, half an hour later. " Maurice will sleep now for some hours and when he wakes the worst of the pain will be over. But I'm not satisfied. Inflammation should not set in, so acutely, for apparently no more severe cause than slight over-fatigue."

Leon, half-dressed, sitting in one of the dining-room window-seats, frowned.

" You think——? "

" I think there is some contributing cause. It may be physical, it may be mental . . . what's that ? " —for Leon had uttered a quickly checked exclamation. Phyllis answered for him.

" You think that—that mental worry, or strain, might cause the increasing severity of the attacks ? "

" It might do," Peter Ryle said, stroking his big beard, " but I don't say that it does. I don't want to make any definite statement just at present. That is why I am asking for a second opinion."

" Anyone you like," Leon said hastily, " you know that. Leave word and I'll telephone to town in an hour or so's time and get a man to come down to-day. Only—for God's sake don't let him suffer like that again ! "

" I won't. Very well, do that. You know your father's mind on the matter. I must be off now, but I'll be back as soon after ten as I can. . . . I've one or

two people I *must* see. Ring up Mr. Edmund Wyatt, 197 Devonshire Street. Ask him from me to get down as soon as he can after midday. If there's any bad recurrence of the pain, give the injection I have left. You know how to do it, Leon. Phyllis, my dear, get straight to bed and sleep, or I'll have you on my hands next. Leon—come out to the car with me, will you?"

Peter Ryle had known them all their lives; he brushed Phyllis's cheek with his bearded lips, went out to his waiting car and stood for a minute, deep in thought.

"I don't want your father alarmed," he said presently. "He's had enough of midnight visits from doctors and nights of anxious watching. Yet he must be told something. Well—I leave it to you."

He was about to step into the car, when Leon stopped him.

"Just a minute. You said—you hinted—that worry might—might have contributed to Maurice's condition. Did you mean that? Seriously?"

"Why, yes." Peter Ryle said, looking rather sharply at the younger man. "Do you happen to know whether he has anything on his mind, then?"

Leon felt his throat oddly tight. That secret certainty, kept so long and desperately at bay, in his mind, was at bay no longer, but possessing his every thought. For the first time in his life he felt unable to look another man in the face, and miserably trying to seem at his ease he bent over the wheel as if to examine something about the car.

"I—think so—perhaps," he stammered. "It's only—an idea——"

Peter Ryle did not press him. Quite gently he pushed him aside and got in to the driving seat.

"That may help us—later," he said quietly. "Don't cross your bridges before you get to them, dear

lad," and swung the little Cadillac away down the curve of the drive.

At breakfast brother and sister did not meet. Leon, driven half desperate by his thoughts, had taken the Dwarf, a chestnut hack of Hugh's, of vile temper, out for a lengthy gallop, and Phyllis had the guests staying from the dance to look after. It was not till they had departed that Norah, learning of Maurice's illness from Cathleen's telephone message, had come over and taken the three children and their visitors back with her to Wrexford; and the surgeon was closeted with Peter Ryle behind closed doors, that the two came face to face.

The golden peace of the afternoon lay upon the country-side, flaming hedgerows and woods painted scarlet and amber and vivid crimson, with a dreaming sky of tender blue above and all the rich fulness of the earth in the sound of thrashing from many farms, and a man and woman faced by desperate knowledge known to each—yet not, as yet, shared.

They left the gardens behind and walked up the hill to the edge of the moor, and there, with the purpling heather about them and all the scents of heath and warm honeyed sweetness in the air, with the wide view of field and copse, garden and woodland and far blue sea, stretching below spoke of the thing that had to be said.

It was Leon who broke the silence that had lasted since he had suggested the walk half an hour ago, and his first words were oddly different from what he had intended.

"Hugh—we must never let Hugh know."

He spoke slowly, pulling at the short, strong ling with nervous fingers, and Phyllis nodded.

"No. . . . Did you ever wonder before. . . ."

"Yes. Ever since Gene's return was spoken of. I



don't know what first made me think . . . it wasn't a thought at first . . . it was just a vague formless fear. . . . I don't know what we ought to do. He let another man stand trial for his life . . . Maurice . . . God in heaven, how horrible ! ”

He buried his face in his hands, shuddering—Leon who never showed emotion ; but Phyllis, eyes gazing away into the golden splendour of the western sky, spoke slowly, as if listening meanwhile to some distant voice.

“ It is no good looking at all that. . . . Gene knew . . . and Gene swore him to silence. And, if Gene did that, it is not for us to speak. . . . God has punished Maurice—not man. You may leave it just where we found it—with Him—and the man I love.”

WHEN they returned it was to find Peter Ryle and Hugh in the library, with the windows wide open to the sunset, and tea, strong beyond drinking, outside on the wide flagged path. Leon, unable to take calmly the thing that had happened, backed out of the room again without saying a word, and Hugh, seeing Phyllis, held out his hand.

"Phyllis—Maurice is to have an operation directly he is strong enough to stand it."

Phyllis glanced inquiringly at Peter Ryle, stood by Hugh's chair a minute or two, and watched fresh tea being prepared with eyes that saw nothing but the past.

"The surgeon thinks there is pressure on the spinal cord that an operation could relieve. . . . He is confident of alleviating the pain to a very great extent . . . my dear . . . are you listening?"

"Yes, Hugh. . . ." Why was it possible to heal the body and leave the soul still crippled and diseased? . . . And no promise should have held weight in such a case. Honour . . . there could be no honour . . . yet Maurice . . . "What is it, Hugh?"

"That was my question to you, Phyllis. What's the matter?"

"I think Phyllis wants her tea. She's had a pretty severe twenty-four hours," Peter Ryle said, watching her with his grave, kind eyes. "See, my dear, if you've had a shock you should rest."

"A shock?" Phyllis turned a startled gaze on him

the colour draining out of her face, "Why? What makes you think that? It was Maurice—all night—it's dreadful to see anyone in such agony."

"That's it," the old doctor said to himself: "she's had something to startle her badly . . . jar to the nerves . . . and it's something to do with Maurice that is not his illness."

Aloud he merely said :

"You've had enough to upset anyone. Sit down and give me some tea and I'll tell you what has been arranged."

Later, when he had gone, Hugh questioned her more closely, certain that for once she was keeping something from him, and Phyllis realised how difficult it would be to keep the thing she had learned a secret from him. She had been so sure, up there on the lonely moor, of the rightness of her advice to Leon, Gene's action in the tragedy taken for the sake of the only human being who had shown him love and tenderness had been so fine a thing in its conception, it seemed that no one else had the right to bring to naught so great a self-sacrifice; yet now, was it right that any human being, knowing the truth, should keep silence?

It was to her a dreadful thing that Maurice should have permitted it . . . should have saved himself at the expense of his friend's whole future, should have kept silence and allowed so appalling a suspicion to attach itself to the man he had called his friend. On the moor she had been caught up for a while to the mountain-top, had been vouchsafed a glimpse of the Infinite Splendour and the high purposes of God. It was not so easy now to see the right course among the shadows and perplexities of everyday life, to submit to the continued condemnation of the man she loved, who mistakenly perhaps had made so blindly heroic a sacrifice.

It was quixotic, beyond all reason, to assume responsibility for such a crime, knowing that it would mean ruin. And he had quarrelled with Maurice. She talked again to Leon, alone in the moonlit garden after dinner, and was conscious of Hugh's puzzled, rather hurt glance, as they left the drawing-room together with no suggestion that he should join them: and it was Leon's recollection of his father's conversation that day over a year and a half ago that gave her enlightenment.

"He said that Gene was a difficult boy. Passionate, ardent—capable of no moderation where his feelings were concerned. And he loved Hugh—the only person in the world who had been kind to him—I suppose that was it. Hugh had got him out of scrapes. Stood between him and Donnisthorpe's hard judgments, and I suppose Gene had no sense of proportion. There was a chance to repay and he took it . . . and never counted the cost. You've got a difficult proposition, Phyllis. Do you feel up to tackling it?"

The question struck Phyllis as merely comical, and for the first time for many hours she laughed.

"Leon—have you ever been in love?"

He answered her promptly, smiling at her reply.

"Hundreds of times!"

"Oh, but really? So that you don't mind what the man or woman you love *does*, just because it *is* them doing it? So that you never want to judge or criticise what you don't understand; you only want to be generous and fine and laugh, not cry, when things go a little crookedly? So few people who love each other can laugh together—and it's one of the best ways to keep love in the world!"

"Even when he tells the same funny story a third time?"

"I didn't say laugh at—I said laugh *with*. Don't

split hairs just for the sake of splitting—and we've got right away from Gene."

"Yes. But only for a time. Listen! I'm going to tell you something. . . . Do you remember the first evening he came here after your engagement?"

"Yes."

"Well—that afternoon we'd met each other—up on the edge of the moor, and he'd told me something of what he told you about himself, and he asked me to stand aside—to watch if I liked, but to give him his chance. And something made me say I would. And it was then that the first suspicion came to me. I asked him why he hadn't called Maurice at the trial—and I was afraid to think about his answer. Really—I suppose I knew. But I couldn't face it, couldn't believe that Maurice could have permitted——"

"That Maurice could have permitted—what?"

They both started violently, and swinging round saw Hugh not a couple of paces away, with Hilary just behind him; in the moonlight the younger man's face was set and his tone controlled, quiet, yet with an edge in it like the edge of a sword-blade, demanded an answer.

"You were talking of Maurice," he said very quietly. "Be good enough to tell me why."

"Uncle Hilary!" Phyllis made a movement towards Hilary Chalmington, desperate that Hugh must suffer this last blow; but Hilary, though he put his hand on her arm, did not interfere.

"Hush, my dear," he said gently, "it's better so."

"What is better so?" Hugh said between shut teeth. "What is it that you both—and you, Hilary—know and I do not? What is it to do with Maurice. Leon . . . will you answer me?"

In the moonlight Leon's ugly, powerful face was very white.

"I can't sir," he said thickly. "Can't you guess without?"

But Phyllis, all the old, passionate devotion to Hugh welling up in her heart, suddenly caught him, holding him close with her arms about him as if to shelter him by her body from some tangible danger.

"No, don't guess, Hugh!" she wailed, and for the first time in all those weary months her self-control gave utterly. "Don't guess, my darling! Don't! Don't! Uncle Hilary—you know—stop him! stop him! Leon—ah! don't let him know this last!"

Leon took her away, loosening her grip on Hugh's shoulders and drawing her a little apart, and Hugh, shocked by her collapse, impatient with the mystery he felt about him, angry as a man who feels himself kept in the dark, swung round on his brother.

"There seems to be an extraordinary mystery over something," he said sharply. "For heaven's sake speak out."

And Hilary was wise enough to obey, knowing that the truth must be told and that it was kinder to tell it quickly.

There was complete silence when he finished. Phyllis leant on Leon, gripping his arm with both hands, the tears running down her face, and Leon, frowning, watched Hugh, who took the blow in silence, nodded, said after a minute: "Thank you for telling me the truth, Hilary," and walked away over the grass to the house.

Leon made a movement, but his uncle stopped him.

"Let him alone," he said gently. "He's best by himself for a little. . . . Phyllis, my dear, come indoors and sit down, you're worn out."

"I'm stupid," Phyllis said shakily. "It seems so cruel after all Hugh has been through . . . and Gene



sacrificed all these years to keep the knowledge from him. . . ."

"I know," Hilary said. "I have always known. Gene did not tell me, but Maurice did. He lost his nerve and told me the truth. He was engaged to be married, as you know, and although he appeared to love Irene Wyndham he could not bring himself to give up this little dancer, Toni. And Gene fell in love with her too. They quarrelled violently, and Toni, flattered and interested, kept them both unknown to each other as her lovers. Two nights before Maurice's wedding, by some evil mischance they met in Toni's flat; there was a fierce quarrel all round. Toni was terrified, and Gene threatened to kill her for deceiving him. He was like a madman, and Maurice only got him out by the porter hearing and coming up to the flat. Between them they got him down, pitched him out and Maurice apparently went after him, but in reality went back to Toni. I imagine from what happened that the poor child—she was little more—took an overdose of the drug she habitually took to make her sleep, and when in the early morning Maurice awoke it was to find her dead or dying—quite unconscious . . . the day before his wedding day. . . . He lost his head . . . found Gene still dazed and stupid from his rough handling and heavy drinking, dragged him into the flat, left him there, and bolted without anyone seeing him.

"When the day porter came up at midday it was to find Gene just rousing . . . he had been drinking again since Maurice's departure, having no idea of Toni's plight . . . and the girl quite dead.

"The rest is easy to guess. Gene had made a great upset—two people had heard him threaten to kill her—he was proven drunk and violent, and the result was arrest for murder."

“ And Maurice ”—Leon’s voice was hard—“ kept quiet.”

“ Yes, Maurice kept quiet. For the moment out of sheer panic, I think. Then—later—when he realised what confession would mean—he was afraid.”

“ Afraid ! ”

Leon echoed the word bitterly enough. To him such cowardice was unimaginable, and the man who could permit such an outrage on one who had been his friend, one with the scum of the earth. And that man was his brother—whom he had loved. Leon’s nature, singularly direct and honest, could no more comprehend or visualise the temptations and weaknesses of a temperament like Maurice’s than he could comprehend the desire to cheat at cards. He loathed cowardice as all healthy normal men do loathe it, and he was as hard in his judgments upon those men who failed to come up to the standard of courage as his fellows. Leon would have died sooner than purchase freedom or life at such a cost—to him they would have not been worth their cost ; and Hilary Chalmington, recognising this, made no further attempt to excuse or explain the inexplicable, but turned to Phyllis and drew her arm within his.

“ For nearly twelve years Maurice has lived with this knowledge. For nearly twelve years he has faced the condemnation of his own soul. An accident crippled him, but do you think any crippling could alone have changed him to what he is now ? He has suffered terribly in his physical self, we all know—but what must his mental suffering have been ? Maurice has imagination—too much of it. It was imagination that made him play so disastrous a part—and imagination can punish as well as exalt. Gene has suffered—but of the two I think no one would hesitate were they asked to change places with him.”

Phyllis took her underlip between her teeth. It was absurd, idiotic, utterly foolish, for the tears to keep on running down her face, yet no force of will seemed able to check them ; indeed she seemed to have no will at all. She walked blindly, not attempting to talk, and at the hall door Hilary bent forward and kissed her.

" My dear, you're worn out," he said gently. " Go to bed and think of Gene. Things will come right for him. They shall. God bless you.

And, as she left them, he looked at Leon and, unknowing, spoke almost the same words she had used earlier in the day.

" God has taken the punishment of Maurice into His Hands," he said. " Shall we add to his burden ? "

"GENE, I'm expecting friends out from New York. They may be here to luncheon, or may not. Anyhow I shall bring them down to see your house and all round the place."

It was a day in early November, and above the painted woods the sky was a pale tender blue, the air soft, windless, with a tinge of frost night and morning touching the leaves to flame and making the wood fire a joyful thing.

Gene, in riding breeches, English brown riding-boots well worn and mellow, and loose, shabby tweed coat, stood in the porch of Napier's house smoking an after-breakfast pipe. He looked hard and lean and fit; gazing closely one might observe a scar on his left temple running up into the crisp dark-brown hair, but his eyes were clear, his general appearance that of a man in perfect physical condition; and if the eyes betrayed him sometimes in the desolation that lay beneath their fierceness, they were all that did, and Napier was satisfied with his experiment.

"I'll have everything ready. By the way, I wanted to ask you about getting those new sheds built. If you think of buying any Jerseys at the sale on Tuesday, you'll soon have to enlarge the accommodation. There's not really enough room."

"You think not?" Napier said, pulling on his short briar that was not drawing properly. "Well—get

ahead with them, then. You've handed me over such a nice little cheque that the building of a couple of cowsheds won't be a very serious item. Oh—by the way—have the balance-sheet ready for me after lunch, will you?"

Gene nodded and smiled. In the fourteen months he had worked for Napier the two had become close friends, finding much in common and both thoroughly enjoying the work of turning Morning Face into a paying proposition.

The house had been given its quaint name by some former owner, and Beatrice Napier had loved it too much to change it. Less than two hours' motor run from New York, two miles from a station, the house stood high, facing across its gardens, pastures, and woods to the rocky coast and the rising sun, a big, comfortable place surrounded by really beautiful gardens and fine timber. Indoors it was spacious, well planned, extremely comfortable, and its new owners loved it and filled it with friends, American and English, during the six months they spent on this side the Atlantic.

On this particular morning Napier was motoring into New York and expected to bring friends back with him as he very often did, and Gene looked forward to a long, uninterrupted morning on work that a few days' absence—inspecting cattle that Napier wished to buy from a farm that raised pedigree stock some twelve hours' journey distant—had allowed to accumulate.

He walked the half-mile that separated Morning Face from the house that he lived in, in a few minutes, his keen glance taking in every detail of the scene around him. A gate swinging loose on its hinges, a field given over to winter wheat and already showing a promise of green—ditches that still needed clearing

and fences still needing repair. A wood that needed thinning had yet to be attacked—so much had had to be left undone for the sake of that which had been done, and now Napier's determination to raise and stock more cattle had called for new sheds and a general survey of the place's limitations.

The outline of the mountains away to the west, blue with the colour of bloom on grapes, rose in long, sweeping curves against the clearer, paler colour of the sky—mountains that were too far off to show their detail of copse and stream and gorge, yet near enough to frame the landscape with their lovely summits.

Eastward the rocky coast met the surge of the Atlantic, to-day smooth as a southern sea ; southward below the horizon lay New York, and northward beyond the rich pasture and cornland the great woods rolled away to the Canadian border. Already Gene loved the place, putting into its work an intense and vital energy, and living on weekly letters to and from Phyllis ; who for the last year had been kept almost entirely at Standingrydge owing to Hugh's long illness and slow convalescence.

He was expecting his weekly letter either to-night or first post in the morning ; consequently he whistled as he inspected the farm, gave orders, helped handle some truculent cattle, and, finally, about half-past twelve, went towards his own house to do his delayed accounts and balance-sheet.

The house stood facing south, a two-storied brick house with a high-pitched roof, big sleeping-porches in the short wing at either end, wide casement windows sheltered by outside green shutters, and spacious bed- and living-rooms. Outside, creepers softened the outlines of the walls, and at the back a wide lawn, closed in by great herbaceous borders, ran level to



a large bricked pool, and trees and orchards sheltered the house on either side. It was far too big for a single man and would have made an ideal house for a family, and Gene sometimes strolling through it thought how wonderful a home it might be for Phyllis and himself.

He thought of her now, then pulled up his thoughts roughly enough. The only trace of those dreadful injuries in the far-off Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes was a queer tendency to lose self-control over thoughts of the woman he so passionately loved. Emotion had a way of taking the bit between its teeth when he thought of her too much, and such weakness could only be conquered by stern marshalling of his forces.

He sat himself down in the room he had taken for his study, and with account books and papers about him set himself to his work, and just after one leant back in his chair, ran his hand over his hair, with a stifled yawn. His ride round the boundaries of the place would be pleasant in the autumn afternoon—probably Napier's visitors would leave pretty early for New York. It was to be hoped so. Napier ought to inspect one or two details himself. . . . Damnation! . . . here they were already . . . and he had half an hour's further work before he finished. The sound of voices came to him through the open window, and he thrust back his chair and was just rising to his feet when Napier himself opened the door.

"Go and look after them for a moment, will you?" he said. "I want to telephone."

Gene went to the door.

"I've very nearly got the things ready," he said. "If you see them by two-thirty, will that do?"

"More than well—they're in the living-room."

Napier's manner was jerky for him, and Gene noted it half-unconsciously as he went across the wide hall, pushed the half-open door of the living-room open, and saw just inside the tall, clean-built figure of a man.

"General Napier will be back——" he began ; then broke off sharply, eyes narrowed suddenly, whole figure tense.

"Chalmington!"—for the man who faced him was Hugh Chalmington.

Just for an instant their eyes met. Then, with a sudden movement, Gene started forward in an agony of anxiety.

"Phyllis——"

"Phyllis is quite well, Gene. I've come over to tell you that I know—that Maurice told——"

All the emotion died out of Gene's face. It grew hard and set and fierce.

"What has Maurice told?" he said, in a voice of ice.

"The truth," Hugh said thickly. "Oh, Gene—my dear—what can I say to you?"

He held out his hand, wrung the other's, and then with a sudden gesture of impotence turned away ; and Gene, coldly furious, stood like a statue beside the table. So, in spite of everything, Maurice had failed in courage once again as he had failed before ; and the sacrifice of twelve years had been in vain. It need never have been made. The fury died down as quickly as it had arisen. He felt suddenly tired and hopeless and utterly dejected. With a queer despairing gesture he turned away and went across to the farther door that led to the dining-room. . . . He supposed Napier meant him to act as host and give luncheon, and it was late.

"Gene!"

He straightened his sagging shoulders with a jerk. Was he crazed or dreaming? . . . swung round, and there, not an arm's length away from him, stood Phyllis, hands outstretched and, though she smiled, with the tears running down her face.

HALF an hour later Napier came to the living-room, his hand through Hugh Chalmington's arm, and interrupted callously.

"We're extremely hungry," he remarked, "and have waited in vain for lunch. If we remove our objectionable presence immediately afterwards, do you think you could give us something to eat?"

Rather dazed, Gene got up, and Phyllis, far more self-composed of the two, laughed.

"We might," she said. "What do you think, Gene? And could you show me to a bedroom in this delightful house of yours where I can wash my face? Dust—and crying"—utterly unashamed, glorying in her love, she looked frankly from one to the other—"are dreadfully unbecoming!"

"Of course—I'm sorry," Gene stammered. "This way—I'll send a maid to you."

"I don't want a maid, darling. I merely want some warm water and a comb . . . and powder . . . oh, I've got some of that, never fear! But I'll wash first."

On the threshold of a cool grey and wistaria room leading to a tiny green-tiled bathroom she stopped. lifted her arms and linked them about his neck.

"I'm not going back, Gene," she said, eyes reading his, "I've come to stay. If you can't get free and marry me I'll stay without, but I'm not going back. I've thought it all over for a year and I've made my choice."

Holding her close he kissed her till she was limp and helpless and breathless in his arms.

"You can't—you mustn't—mustn't," he stammered, but she silenced him.

"I'm not a child, or a very young girl who doesn't know what she's doing—darling—why did I tell you now—when we've got to go down and try to behave?—I'm an idiot!"

"You are my beloved!" he said, choking, and hid his face against her neck.

It was a patient and starving couple whom he found waiting a minute or two later, fortified, however, by a visit of the old coloured cook and excellent cocktails which had no acquaintance with Prohibition; but it was with distinct relief that the two elders departed on a walk round the place, leaving Phyllis and Gene in the big living-room.

"You've heard nothing fresh from your lawyers since I had your last letter, I suppose?" Phyllis asked after a while. "Nothing satisfactory?"

"Nothing. Alma intends to give all the trouble she can. If she knew you were here——"

"She might be willing to sue for divorce? Well—let her know. I can face anything she can do—gladly."

Miserably, he held her close, feeling once again where his wild youth had led him.

"But I can't for you. You don't know what she is, dear. You mustn't do this thing . . . she'd pour vile abuse on you . . . sully your name with the foulest words . . . and I should kill her. That would be the last thing—it would be murder, dear, and worse, perhaps."

Womanlike, half-teasing, half in earnest, Phyllis fell back on the old reproach.

"You don't want me—you don't care enough——"

His response frightened her, brought them both to

the verge of disaster, drove the man panting and shaken to the coolness of the open windows afraid lest he should injure the thing he loved; left the girl trembling, her eyes dazed and soft with passion, her pride in him flaming, in that he thought for her when she had ceased to care or think for herself.

Presently, steadied and quieter, she spoke, watching him, as he stood, back to her.

"You're right, dear," she said, "I'm beginning to think you're always right. . . . It mustn't happen this way . . . it must be a deliberate step . . . a deliberate acknowledgment, a sure, considered thing, because we intend to be together, to love and cherish each other as truly married lovers do. Cherish . . . it's rather a beautiful word, Gene. . . . You have shown me how you appreciate it."

He made some inarticulate reply, his whole nature urging him to turn and take her in his arms, to make her his, irrevocably, without delay or hesitation, his care for her alone fighting his desire: and Phyllis watching him knew just what he was enduring and loved him the more for it.

"I know what I'm saying—what the risks are," she said after a while. "I suppose it's wrong—and yet—I don't know. Alma——"

The sound of her name upon such lips was unendurable. Roughly he said:

"Don't—not that——" And Phyllis got up and went over to him, standing at a little distance.

"Come out into the open," she said gently. "Our love, whatever we decide to do with it, mustn't be a thing afraid of the sunshine and the light and the great spaces of life. I used to think everything was black or white . . . easy to define. . . . I know now why we are told not to judge others. . . . It's all very simple . . . but it's different."



Later, together, they all drove back to New York, where they were all to stay in the Napiers' apartment for a couple of days while Hugh arranged one or two business details for his visit. Gene spoke for the first and last time to Hugh Chalmington of the thing that his boy's passion of love and gratitude had done.

"Does Maurice know?"

Gene had driven in from the country, Phyllis muffled in a fur coat beside him, the wonderful autumn stars over their heads, the scent of the autumn woods in the air about them, and now for a moment Hugh and he were alone, since they had both dressed early.

At his question, Hugh nodded.

"Yes. He sent no message—he could not."

"I know that," Gene said grimly. "I want to forget—all there is between him and me. . . . I'm not very far up in the scale, I suppose. I can't pretend to forgive—not the first thing—that was my own deliberate doing—but this last. His telling after all these years. . . . I'm pretty sure I never shall."

Napier entering put a stop to the subject, and there was no chance to resume it, for Beatrice Napier had booked stalls for one of the most interesting plays in town, and in answer to her husband's: "My dear girl, they won't want to go to any theatre. They'd much rather stay behind here, by themselves," had merely smiled, said in her turn: "That's why it's better for them to come," and left him wondering at the way women came to their conclusions.

The theatre was full; Gene, absorbed in Phyllis, never saw Alma come into a box with a sultry and extremely prosperous South American; but she saw him, went through a spasm of rage seeing his companion, sat rather back where she could see and not be seen, and found her millionaire clasping something round her wrist.

It was a bracelet of immense diamonds, indescribably hectic like the giver, but representing to Alma something very like the Kingdom of Heaven.

"That is for you to keep the moment you say you will marry me!" her adorer remarked, having seen as quickly as she the occupants of certain stalls. "It suits your wrist so well——"

He bent down behind the curtain to kiss the wrist above the bracelet, and Alma shivered; already he dominated her senses as his wealth dominated her mind. As if he read aright her thoughts, he added in a thick whisper:

"What is the good of bothering about him? I can give you much more. Did he ever give you such as this? And I love you . . . but you must marry me."

He did in his way; she did not know the streak of colour that ran in his blood, shutting him out from so much he desired; if she found out afterwards he could handle her, and she was fair with the fairness he so ardently admired.

Alma looked at the bracelet, looked again at Gene, feeling a wave of hatred rise in her heart towards him; then felt the grip of soft, highly manicured fingers on her neck.

"Decide quickly, my beautiful . . . a necklace to match the bracelet perhaps." After all revenge was poor satisfaction compared to thousands of pounds' worth of diamonds. She decided as her soul, if she had one, made her, and the South American dago millionaire was satisfied with his purchase.

Just as they were planning their morning, a telephone call kept Gene for ten minutes to his own room, and when he came out and entered Beatrice Napier's sitting-room there was an odd look on his face.

"I've got to go down town," he said. "Phyllis, will you come with me, dear? We'll be back in half an hour or so, Mrs. Napier."

"Take the car; it's outside," she said, wondering what news awaited him. "We shan't be going out just yet."

And as they went down in the elevator Gene said: "It's from my lawyers. Urgent. You don't mind coming?"

"Mind?"

She laughed at the question, and as the car threaded the traffic of Fifth Avenue put out her hand and took his.

"Isn't it a wonderful morning? Like iced wine—all sparkles and life. I love New York in the fall. There! I'm getting quite American. It's such a lovely word—'fall.' It pictures the leaves and the colour. Let's go out to the country this afternoon and see the woods."

She talked on, not waiting for very much response from him, and he sat looking ahead of him frowningly, only the close grip of his hand telling her what he felt.

In the private office the two partners of David Einstein, Ryan & Son sat awaiting their client, and as

he entered it might almost have been said that David Einstein, a patriarchal white-bearded Jew with kindly, keen old eyes showed excitement—save that such a phenomenon had never yet been witnessed within the building.

Gene shook hands with them both, thought of Phyllis sitting in the car, fourteen floors below, and set himself to take whatever was coming to him. Einstein spoke first.

"This morning at nine o'clock I received a call on my private wire to my home from—er—from Mrs. Hugon," he began. "It seems she is staying at the Belmont. She stated her business quite briefly, but it was rather startling in itself. My partner——" He paused as if its recital were almost beyond him, and Ryan took up the tale.

"Mrs. Hugon informed me that she was about to marry a South American millionaire. . . . Wait, if you please, Mr. Hugon—she also stated that her marriage to you ten years ago was null and void, since at that time her former husband was yet living. It seems he died in 1913. Of course she ran the risk of being charged for bigamy, but she gambled on a chance and won."

Gene put his hand to his collar—it felt too tight about his throat.

"She was married——" he began rather hoarsely, and stopped.

"Alma Wallein was never your wife at all, Mr. Hugon. She married Carl Wallein, a Swiss Jew, two years before she met you. He deserted her a few months afterwards and she lived for a while with a man named Peters—Nathaniel Peters—what's that?"

"Nat Peters was—was—one of my men——" Gene said, stumbling over his words, then stopped, remembering. Nat Peters had got away when the Sheriff's

officers had overpowered the gang in that scorching New Mexican desert—the only one who *had* got away. Slowly, because his mind found it difficult to comprehend quite what it was being told, he began to put two and two together. It was Peters who had double-crossed them to get him out of the way, because he wanted Alma, and he believed her to be Gene's wife. . . . Einstein had taken up the story, and Gene forced his wandering attention to what was being said.

"Of course we are not taking her word alone in so serious a matter. My partner has already seen her and obtained a sworn statement, and this evening we are sending a trusted man to look up the marriage register and obtain the necessary legal proof. She has given us the exact dates and names to aid us, and is evidently wishful to settle the whole matter as speedily as possible to enable her to marry this South American. We congratulate you very heartily, Mr. Hugon, if this should prove to be true."

Gene nodded absently. He felt dazed, yet rather impatient. Knowing Alma he realised that only the chance of a great deal of money could have persuaded her to forgo her vengeance on him, and as he thought the old murderous rage rose in his heart. What had he done that two people should so set about to wreck his chance for happiness? He made for the door, heard Ryan speak his name and old Einstein say in his quiet voice: "Leave him alone, Ryan," and went out of the office, like a blind man seeing nothing.

Somehow he got down to the street, murder in his heart, the savage, yet cold, fury that of all anger is the most deadly, and saw, straight before him, Phyllis's face as she sat in the car watching the doorway. She must have read the signs of which he was unconscious, for she suddenly sprang up, fumbled with the door,

flung it open and came across to him, hands outstretched.

"Gene—dearest—what is it? What is it?"

He made no answer, but followed her to the car and got in. Seeing the man still standing by the door, he turned on him.

"What the hell are you waiting for?"

The man's eyes flickered, but he was well enough trained to take the question quietly, though he answered as insolently as he dared:

"To know where to go," omitting the courtesy title.

Gene made a sudden movement, and Phyllis said:

"I'd love to go right round the Park, slowly. May we, dear? Round the Park, please, Reilly, and don't drive fast."

"Very good, miss," Reilly said and went to his place, taking the car away up town at a swinging pace that checked to an easy twenty as they turned into the Park opposite the Plaza Hotel.

Phyllis, watching Gene unobtrusively, said nothing for a while and sat looking at the painted beauty of the trees; then presently felt her hand taken, and turning towards him found him watching her.

"Gene," she said very softly, "does anything matter, dear, if we have each other?"

The words were ordinary enough—men and women have said them to each other since the world began—but her eyes and the warm response of her hand said so much of the unsayable truths, and Gene caught fire as men have always done.

"No," he said violently, "nothing matters but that. Phyllis—Alma wants to marry—she will set me free——" He broke off at her low cry of joyous relief, and regardless of the glass sides of the limousine caught her close and kissed her.



"Let's go out—somewhere—and get quite in the country," he said. "I want to talk to you—I've got things to say. I'll tell him."

He stopped to pick up the speaking-tube to give directions to the chauffeur. Then, his arm once again about her, looked down at her with ardent eyes.

"You darling! You understand so wonderfully and I've been in a savage temper. Forgive me. You'll understand when I tell you. Phyllis—it's so inexplicable to me that you didn't shrink in disgust from the object I was that day on the train. And even then I was bad-tempered. You'll find out what that means."

"Don't be bad-tempered with me though," she said, half smiling, half serious, "because I shan't be, with you. I don't want, or need, to show an ugly side to the people I love, and I could not bear it if you showed yours to me. I could *not*, Gene. We've all of us got it, that ugly side. But it ought to be hidden at home. I want our home to be the one place in the world for rest and healing and joy. Oh, I'm moralising—only—I don't want our life to be like that of so many people—just making the best of a mistake."

"I can't afford mistakes," Gene said sombrely. "I've made enough. My life's been all mistakes, one after another, up to now."

"Not your last adventure!" Phyllis said. "My dear, I've not told you yet—except in letters—just how splendid it was. When I read it in the English papers you can guess how I felt."

"It was nothing—in that way," Gene said in sudden embarrassment. "Anyone would have done it. I happened to be the fastest runner, that's all. If the other two hadn't been away from the valley, they'd have seen the danger before themselves. That's

nothing to build a fresh life on, Phyllis, and the old one's no good."

"It seems to me to be a very good start," she objected. "Sacrifice . . . you know, Gene, I used to think, often, of all this when I was in England those six years after I saw you first. . . . America . . . particularly the West, always appeared to me as a land of enchantment—and that evening after—after you had left the train I sat out at the back till it was quite dark, just looking back to the place where they took you away from me. The sky was all crimson and gold with long lines of flame across it and a rosy flush over the desert . . . it was just that to me . . . an enchanted country . . . unreal perhaps, but strange and beautiful. I didn't stop to analyse things. I knew you were . . . what you should not be . . . but when you looked at me . . . first . . . then I loved you. And I have loved you ever since."

His answer was a close and passionate embrace, and for the moment he was past speech. Her trust in him, her unswerving, unquestioning loyalty shamed him. He dared not promise great things. It had never been his way to speak much of what he intended to do; but his passionate love for Phyllis was the motive-power of his whole existence, and he knew that, whatever his sins and mistakes, he was no weakling. He had stained soul and body with crime, but the essence of all that she represented was forgiveness—the God he had always believed in even in his most desperate and wretched moments. The independence of the individual soul so long as life lasted—the power of future personal choice in the destiny of good or evil, whatever the past had held.

Many thoughts chased through his mind as he sat there, his arm around her, his hand holding hers in a grip that showed her his attention was undividedly

hers even though he gazed unseeingly ahead in silence.

He had destroyed so many fair pages of his life, defaced so sadly the image of the Divine. He had blamed Maurice for the first tragedy, but was it not rather the natural result of his wasteful, undisciplined youth? He had developed early in a hard school—he had been lonely and tormented, but he had known good and evil and had deliberately chosen the evil . . . and though the mercy of God be eternal, that mercy does not interfere with the natural law of cause and effect. If forgiveness is certain, punishment is also certain, and punishment had assuredly been his—would be still.

He said not one word to her of the news Einstein and Ryan had given him. Not till it was proved beyond all doubt would he tell her, for if proof was not forthcoming she would suffer bitterly. He had not been wont to think of other people, and now, with passion driving him, the effort was doubly hard to make, but he kept silence through all the week which followed, and on the Sunday the news came on the wire from Mr. Einstein's private residence. Their man, Trass, had found the register—a witness was still living—all had been in order . . . Mr. Hugon should hear full details on Monday, but he, Einstein, had thought he would like to know the actual facts at once. Good-bye.

Just for a minute Gene stood at the telephone after he had replaced the receiver, shaking all over with the shock, and Phyllis coming into the room uttered a little cry.

“Dearest! Gene! What is it?”

She went swiftly to him, and, still trembling, he took her hands.

“When will you marry me?” he said. “I am going to get the licence to-day.”

And then, at the amazed question of her look, with a sudden uprush of tenderness and passion he drew her close into his arms.

"Every hour of every day I thank God for you," he said brokenly. "Oh, my dear—my dear!"











